Alessandra Mazzei
Luca Quaratino

THE STATE OF THE ART OF
EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION
IN ITALIAN COMPANIES

Communication and organizational relations
for competitive advantage

Centre for Employee Relations and Communication
Università IULM

FrancoAngeli
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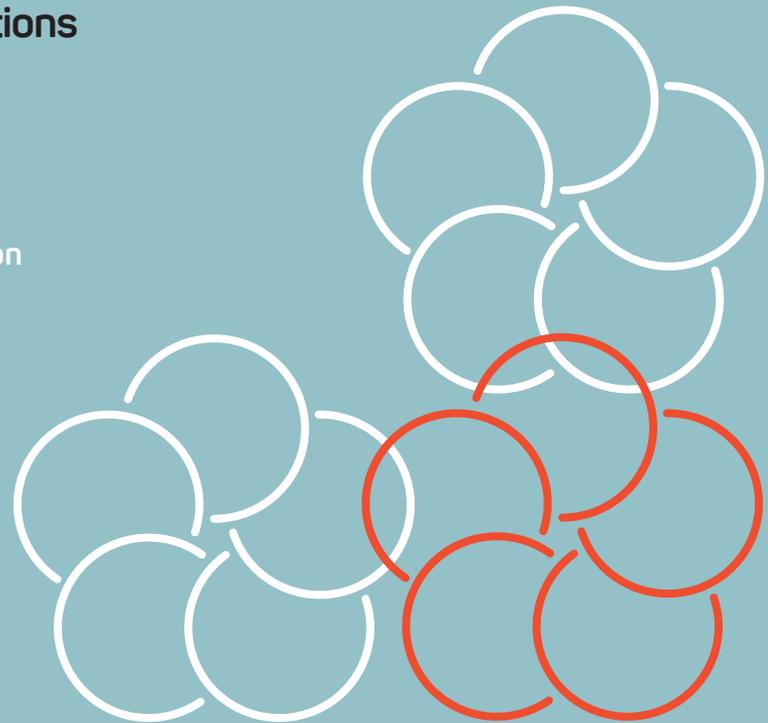
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IULM University
Centre for Employee Relations and Communication
Department of Business, Law, Economics, and Consumer Behavior
"Carlo A. Ricciardi"

Content

Introduction

The state of the art of employee communication in Italian companies outlines the **practices and trends** of employee communication and organizational relations in Italy.

Its findings map the strategic value and the stage of development of the employee communication function in Italian companies.

It has been carried out by the Working Group @Centre for Employee Relations and Communication (CERC) 2018-2020 operating at IULM University, in connection with the CCI at Baruch College/CUNY.

This study was supported by the Department of Business, Law, Economics, and Consumer Behavior "Carlo A. Ricciardi" of IULM University.
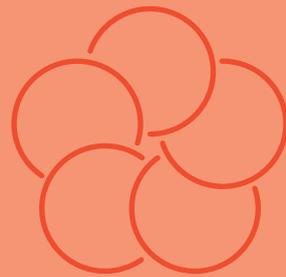
CERC

WG_EC

The **Centre for Employee Relations and Communication** (CERC) has the purpose of developing and spreading communication and organizational relations culture.

It carries out research, dissemination, training and consultancy projects on topics related to employee relations and communication.

It is supported by a scientific committee which ensures its connection with the main international centers of excellence in this field.

It houses the Working Group Employee Communication and is part of the Department of Business, Law, Economics and Consumer Behavior «Carlo A. Ricciardi».

It was established in 2016 as an evolution of the Employee Communication Laboratory, active at IULM University since 2009.

Founded and directed by Alessandra Mazzei

The **Working Group Employee Communication (WG_EC)** is dedicated to a two-year special research project in partnership with a group of companies.

It carries out a research project on an agreed topic.

Partner companies and IULM University researchers meet 3 times a year for updates on the results of the research project and to delve into topics of interest for the WG_EC. The meetings are topic-focused and run in a peer to peer context.

employee.communication@iulm.it
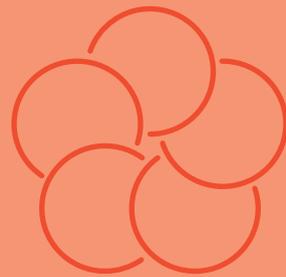
The Working Group Employee Communication 2018-2020

Partner companies of the Working Group Employee Communication 2018-2020 and their representatives:

—
Campari Group
Enrico Bocedi
Annalisa Galli

—
Coopselios
Ilaria Morandi
Giorgia Poliseno

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Cromology Italia
Simona Bargiacchi

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Eni
Valentina Uboldi

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Ferrero
Deborah Parodi
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Gruppo Unipol
Alessandra Cappello
Silvia Cervellera

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Gianluca Togna

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MM
Maria Lucia Lezzi

—
Sanofi
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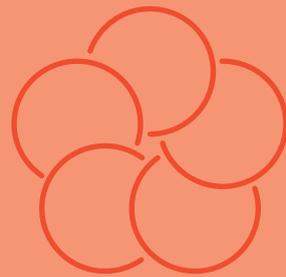
The research team

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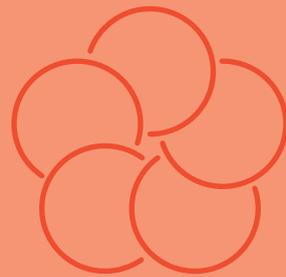
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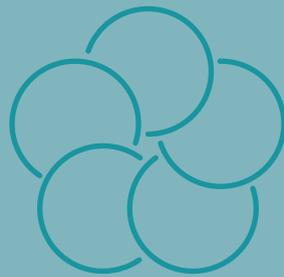
Why a study on the state of the art
of employee communication?

Employee communication and organizational relations constitute a **vital aspect of corporate communication** and their management is a crucial part of the corporate strategy, according both to corporate communication scholars (Falkheimer, Heide, 2018; Cornelissen, 2017; Siano, Vollero, Siglioccolo, 2015; Goodman, Hirsch, 2010; Pastore, Vernuccio, 2008) and to the employee communication ones (Men, Bowen 2017; Yeomans, FitzPatrick, 2017; Zerfass, Franke, 2013; Verčič et al., 2012; Frandsen, Johansen, 2011; Heide, Simonsson, 2011; Kim, Rhee, 2011).

Employee communication and organizational relations are a competitive asset for organizations due to several reasons including the growing competition and the consequent need for innovation, efficiency and effectiveness; the growing impact of employee actions on the brand building and stakeholder engagement; the difficult economic context with the consequent scarcity of resources; the emergence of generational differences; the increase in workforce diversity; and finally the digitization of business processes that is changing the ways of social interaction and requires a strong cultural change.

Given these premises, it is essential to have updated knowledge on **practices and trends of employee communication** that grasps its continuous development.

The state of the art of employee communication in Italian companies is based on:
- an analysis of similar studies previously carried out in Italy and abroad (Mazzei, 2018) to compare the CERC study on employee communication
- a conceptualization of employee communication, relevant to define its perimeter, practices and trends
- a survey on a convenience sample and case histories of companies operating in Italy

The CERC study constitutes a framework that allows to understand the value brought by employee communication to the wider communication system of companies.
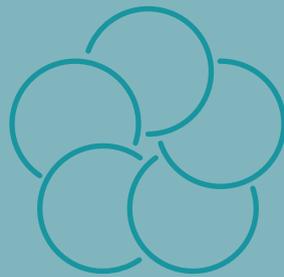
What is the value of the state of the art of employee communication in Italian companies?

It maps the

- **practices** and
- **trends** of employee communication and organizational relations in Italian companies

It provides **a benchmark tool**

- **with other countries** the state of employee communication in Italy can be compared with the situation in other countries. When available, comparison data are reported
- **among companies** each company will be able to map its deviations from the national situation
- **over time** future studies adopting the same framework will capture the evolution of the employee communication

It provides a **model** to evaluate

- the **strategic value** of employee communication in Italian companies
- the **impact** on employee engagement
- which **variables** influence the evolution of employee communication
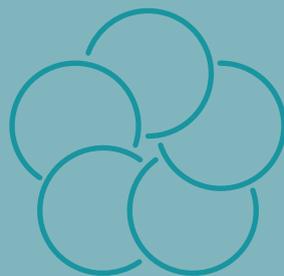
What is
employee communication?

Employee communication is the set of **interactive processes** aimed at generating the **catalytic resources** that make a company work.

These resources are:
- **knowledge** that fuels working processes
- **active allegiance** of employees that encourages them to apply their knowledge to company processes

Thus defined, employee communication includes communication, relationship and interactive processes that generate valuable intangible resources, definitively going beyond the reference to organizational boundaries.

It also focuses on:
- **a constitutive view of communication** in organizations
- the role of **employees as communication activators**
- **managers as a key link** in the network of relationships and communication of a company

Therefore the mission of the function dedicated to employee communication becomes twofold:
- plan and manage a structured system of communication tools to **target company's** messages at its internal stakeholders
- implement an **enablement** employee communication strategy, supporting managers and employees to be strategic communicators

(Mazzei, 2004, 2009, 2010, 2014)

The interactive processes that generate resources of knowledge and active allegiance

Knowledge — Active allegiance
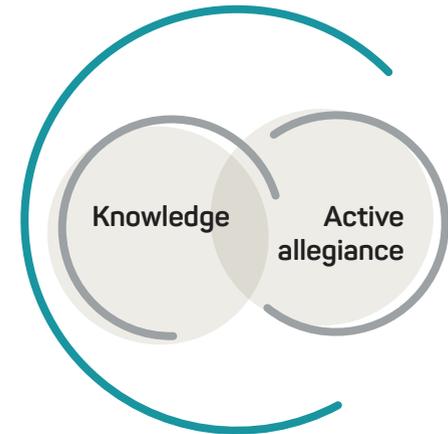
Two missions for the employee communication function
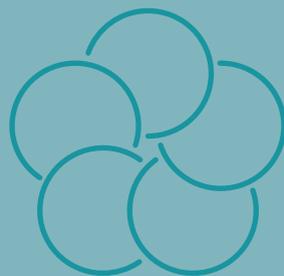
—
Message targeting
to convey company's messages to its internal stakeholders

—
Enablement
enable managers and employees to be strategic communicators

Which research
design?

Method

The CERC study is based on a survey and case histories.

Survey

- online administered questionnaire
- **population**: Italian companies
- **convenience** sample
- respondents: managers **responsible for employee communication**
  - full time
  - ad interim with other activities
- gathered data: 143 respondent companies between November 2018 and February 2019

Case histories

- in order to draw implications for management practices and principles
- to understand more in depth the evolutive dynamics of employee communication and organizational relations

The Enabling Model
of Employee Communication

The CERC study offers a picture of the **state of the art of practices and trends** of employee communication in Italy with reference to the Enabling Model of Employee Communication.

According to the Enabling Model, employee communication is:
- **strategic**:
  supervised by top management, equipped with ad hoc resources, recognized as a source of value
- **run with a managerial approach**:
  uses planning and evaluation methods typical of the managerial cycle
- **aimed at activating employees**:
  based on the supervisor-employee dialogue and on the creation of voice contexts for the free expression of employees
- **digitized**:
  open to experimenting with the new social arenas that arise from digitization

The Enabling Model fosters **employee engagement**, ultimate purpose of employee communication because it is the prerequisite for strategic employee communication behaviors.

Enabling EC
Strategic value

Managerial approach

Employee activation

Digitized

Employee engagement

The respondents

Sample companies identikit

- industries
  heterogeneous

- Small, medium and large companies included. Large companies prevail
  43% with more than 2,000 employees

In most cases:

- Italian-owned
  60%

- multinationals
  76%

- not listed
  51%

- aged
  58% are over 51 years of age

Respondents identikit

In most cases:

- women
  65%

- experienced workers
  52% are between 31-45 years of age

- manager or supervisor role
  45%

- well educated
  57% graduates
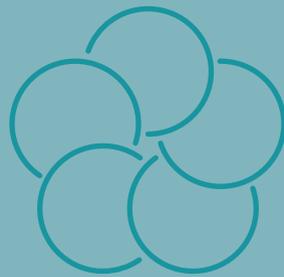
What is the state of the art of employee communication
in Italian companies?

The research findings

Is it strategic?
- Formal function
- Top management defines aims
- Staffing
- Value
- Role

How is it evolving?
- Obstacles to efficacy
- Future challenges

Is it run with a managerial approach?
- Planning
- Budget
- Agencies and providers
- Measurement

Is it digitized?
- Digital channels
- Internal social media (ISM) adoption
- ISM benefits
- Obstacles to ISM adoption
- Obstacles to ISM use

Does it activate employees?
- Aims
- Tools
- Relational and informal communication
- Employees and external communication
- Social media policy

Employee communication...

Is it strategic?

Formal function

Role

Top management defines aims

Value

Staffing
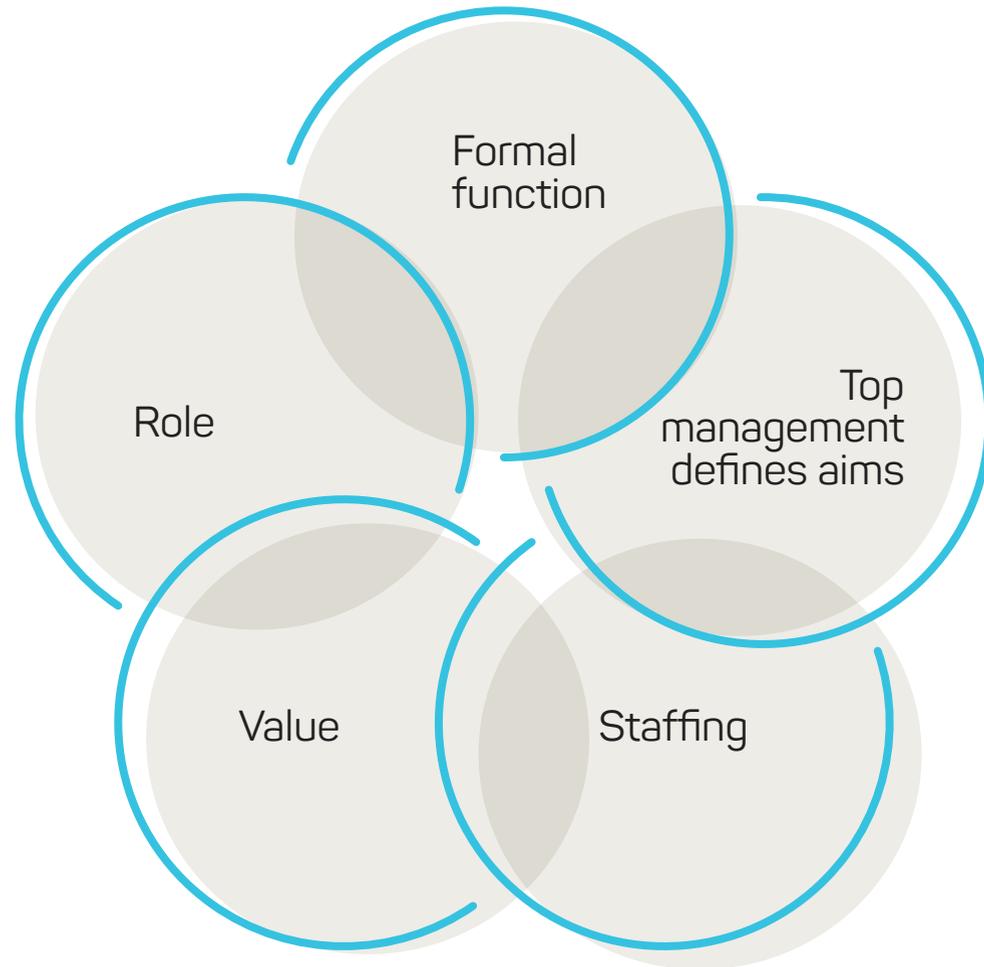
Does a formal function
for employee communication exist?

56%

29%

14%

1%
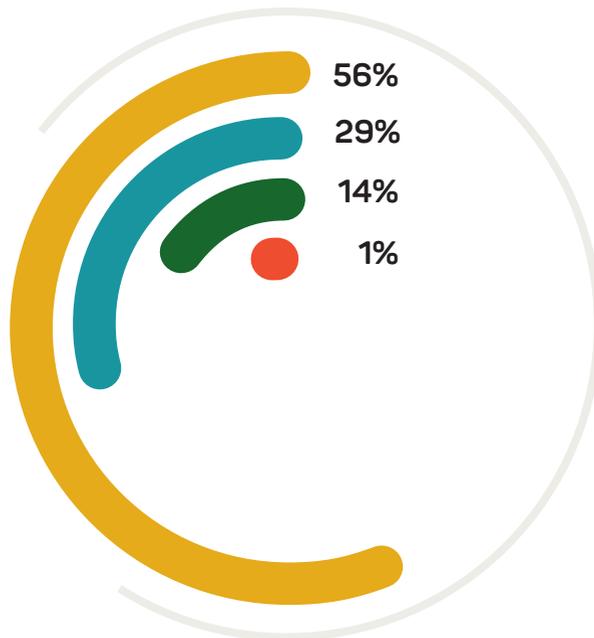
● YES the formal function exists

● NO but its management is structured and continuous

● NO its management is destructured and shared by several functions

● NO any manning at all

n=143

A little more than **half of the companies** have a formal function dedicated to employee communication. This figure is confirmed by other available research.

Somehow a worrying result: it does not reflect the strategic value that is attributed to employee communication as a lever for building trust relationships and employee engagement.

59.6%
(Nelli, 2018)
448 European companies

61.6%
(Nelli, 2017)
159 Italian companies

Campari Group
Institutionalizing employee communication
to support organizational change

The **employee communication function** was institutionalized within the group in 2017 with the aim of **systematically managing the communication activities that were previously carried out in a fragmented way** both globally and locally.

The choice to institutionalize the employee communication function is explained by the need to **support a phase of significant change** that the organization was going through both in terms of **corporate culture** and values and **business strategies**.

More or less parallel to the formalization of the employee communication function, a comprehensive digitization process has started at all levels of the organization, looking at digitization as a general enabling factor for change.

In this context, the company has:
- introduced practices supported by digitization, such as smart working
- leveraged on digitization and above all on the **new employee communication structure** to address **the needs of a greater inter-functional collaboration and of horizontal and vertical exchange** of information and knowledge, that emerged from previous climate surveys

To whom
does employee communication report?

Department		
Corporate Communication Department	44%	36%
Human Resources Department	39%	41%
Marketing Department	7%	2%
Top Management	3%	2%
Organization Department	1%	0%
Others Corporate Affairs - Sales department External consultant	6%	19%
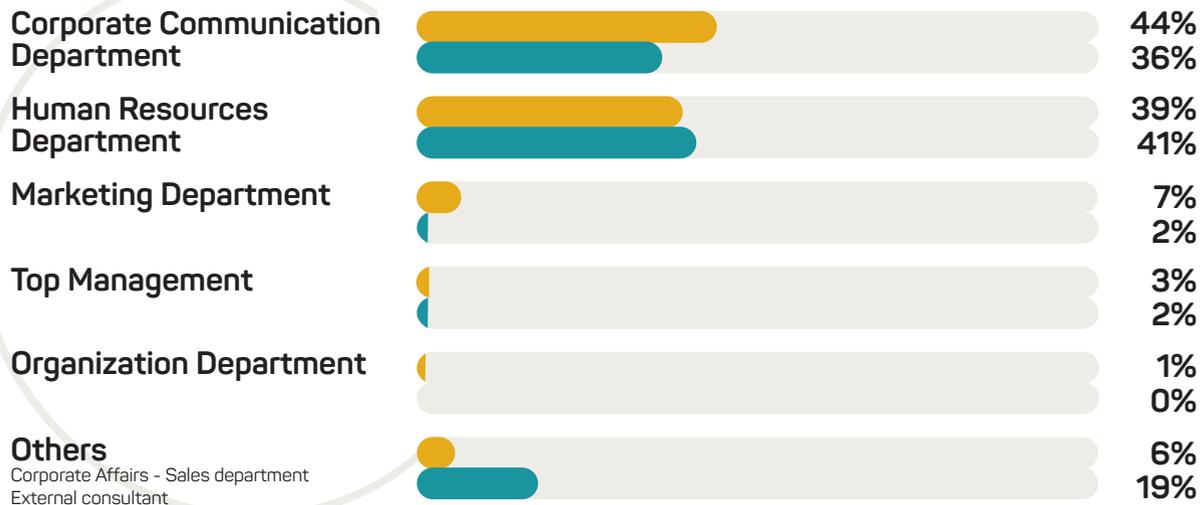
● **To whom does the formal employee communication function report?** (56% of the sample, n= 80)

● **Who's the owner of employee communication when it is managed in a structured and continuous way?** (29% of the sample, n=42)

If there is a formal function for employee communication, it reports to the Corporate Communication Department. Whereas the Human Resources Department manages the activity when it is shared across different functions.
The path towards the establishment of a formal employee communication function involves the **transition from Human Resources to Corporate Communication**.

EC reports to Corporate Communication: **43%** (Gatehouse, 2017)

If there is a formal employee communication function,
for how many years has it been existing?

36% for 6 to 10

30% for 11 to 20

29% for 1 to 5

5% over 20

- for 6 to 10
- for 11 to 20
- for 1 to 5
- over 20

Data refers to **56%** of the sample, that is the **80 cases** in which a formal function of employee communication exists
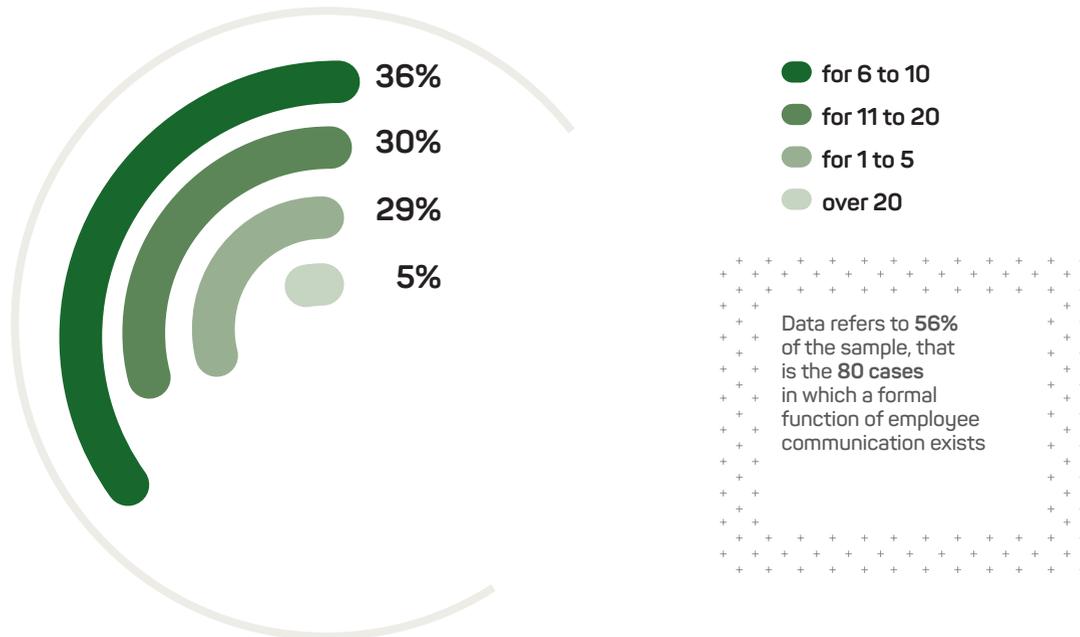
The establishment of a formal employee communication function is a very recent fact: in 29% of cases the function has been existing for 1 to 5 years, in 36% for 6 to 10, for a total of **65%** of cases where it has been existing for **less than 10 years**.

An encouraging fact: just over half of the companies have a function dedicated to employee communication and this number is strongly increasing. A sign that the awareness of the strategic value of employee communication is beginning to assert itself.

How many people
are in the employee communication staff? (full time or part time)

47% ● 2-3

27% ● 1

13% ● 4-6

7% ● 7-9

3% ● 10-20

3% ● over 20
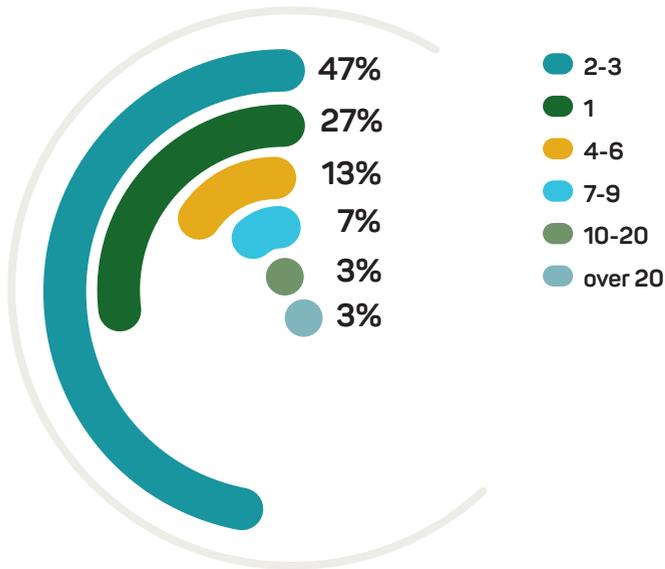
The data refers to the **122 cases** in which there is a formal function or employee communication is managed in a structured and continuous way.

> 6 full time people in companies with > 5,000 employees (Gatehouse, 2017)

1 person	**28%**
2-3 people	**41%**
4-6 people	**16%**

(Nelli, 2018)
448 European companies

No full time person employed in employee communication: **23%**

Teams dedicated to employee communication are very small both in Italy and in Europe.
Many companies in Italy do not have **any dedicated full time resource**.

The small size of teams is a generalized trend and therefore it has to be considered typical of this sector. However, the high incidence of part timers is worrying, because it indicates a low specialization of skills.

How has the number of people evolved
over the past year in the employee communication staff?

70% — Stable
21% — Increased
9% — Decreased
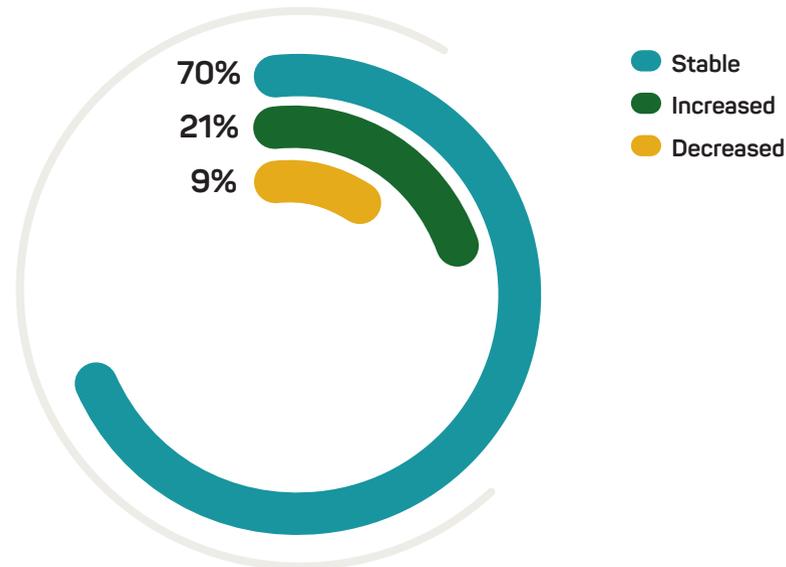
Employee communication teams are very small and tend to remain unchanged or to grow.
This can be interpreted as a sign of the growing investment in the function, of the increase in the specializations in employee communication and of the internalization of employee communication management.
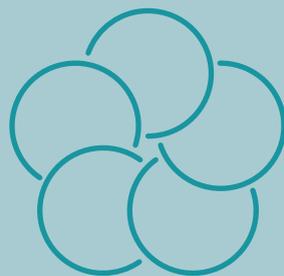
Sanofi
Not just quantity: investing in the skills
of employee communication staff

In Sanofi Italy **employee communication** is managed within the **Audiences & Content structure** of the Corporate Communication Department: this structure **produces content declined on multiple platforms and referred to different targets**, including employees.

The structure leverages on numerous tools:
- website
- various social and digital platforms, such as the external blog on Medium
- internal magazine
- intranet

This declination of work by audience and content responds to new communication dynamics including the dis-intermediation and the contamination of internal and external communication.

Thus, for example, one challenge is **modulating different communication registers** in order to manage in public spaces communications that would be normally considered as internal.

Within the Audience & Content team there are **social media managers, editors**, who are in charge of developing content with a journalistic approach, and graphic designers.

In addition to the skills available within the team, the company leverages also on the **support of two external agencies** for the development of graphical resources, the production of social editorial plan proposals and the social media monitoring and listening, which is also necessary to respect the pharmacovigilance obligations to which Sanofi is subject.

Which is the activity focus
of the employee communication function?

The role of the function

	Role	Description		Score
●	**Specialist**	Implementing tools and initiatives		3.89
●	**Manager**	Managing communication processes		3.53
●	**Explorer**	Listening internally and measuring efficacy		3.14
●	**Advisor**	Counseling managers and teams		3.12
●	**Strategist**	Contributing to strategic company decisions		2.95
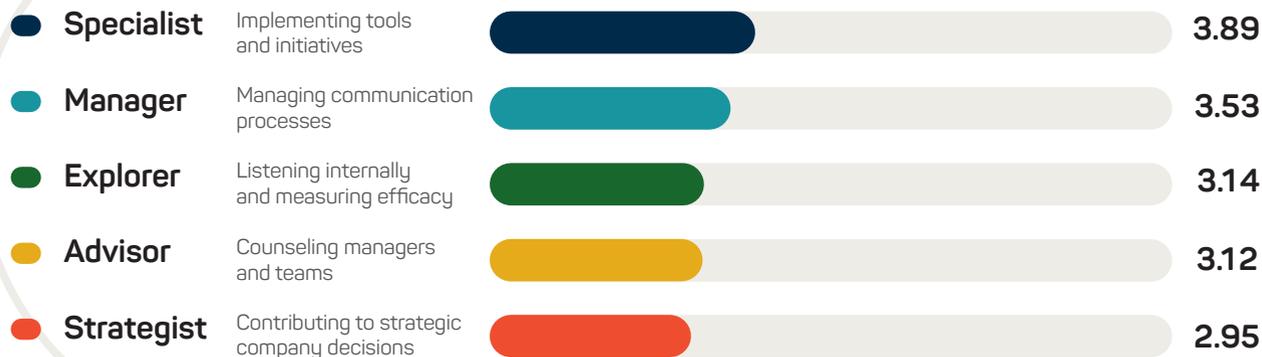
Means on a scale from 1 to 5

According to Euromonitor, in the corporate communication field the four roles of the communication professional are distributed as follows:
- Strategic Facilitators **67.6%**
- Operational Supporters **23.2%**
- Isolated Experts **6%**
- Business Advisers **3.2%**

(Zerfass et al., 2011 in Tench et al., 2017)

The **role** played by those involved in employee communication can be traced back to:
- **Specialist**, that is aimed at creating tools and initiatives which require specific skills, firstly
- **Manager**, that is linked to the responsibility of managing communication processes such as planning and monitoring, as second in importance

The roles of **Explorer** and **Advisor** have a lower importance.

The role of **Strategist** is the least relevant, even if it is the one connected to the impact of employee communication on business decisions.

Basically there is room for the growth of the function impact on the company in the broadest sense.

Is top management involved in defining the aims
of employee communication?

Average involvement 3.78
Mean on a scale from 1 to 5

34% **66%**

3%   15%   16%   34%   32%

Not at all   **Very much**
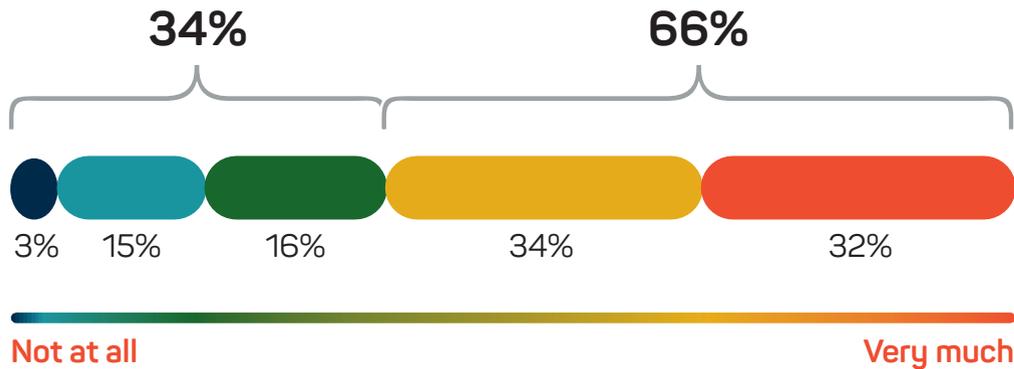
In a relevant number of cases, top management is involved in defining the aims assigned to the employee communication function. A sign of attention from top management and awareness of the fact that this lever affects overall company results.

Top management defines EC aims **29%** (Nelli, 2010)

How much value does employee communication generate
for its stakeholders?

Average generated value 3.62
Mean on a scale from 1 to 5

How much value generated for

Human resources management	**3.99**
External communication management	**3.70**
Employees	**3.58**
Top managers	**3.57**
Line managers	**3.28**

The communication value is to be found in its ability to organize and create value. **The maturity of the communication function is measurable through the value perceived by the key stakeholders within the company.** The Communication Maturity Index (CMI) includes six areas:
• understanding
• function
• organization
• prerequisites
• competence
• practices and assessmen methods
An exploratory study of **11 European companies** has shown that key stakeholders underestimate the value generated by communication.
(Johansson et al., 2019)

The self-perception of the value that is attributed by internal stakeholders to the work of the function is a very important indicator. **The respondents do not feel fully recognized but not even ignored.** They feel they can make a contribution and to be able to make it perceived, albeit not completely: the produced value perceived by internal stakeholders must increase, especially outside the specialistic functions (human resources and external communication), that is to say in the eyes of line managers and top managers, who are the crucial hubs of employee communication.

Which kind of value does employee communication generate for its stakeholders?

Stakeholders

Human Resources management

External communication management

Employees

Top managers and line managers

Received value

Stakeholder	Received value	Mean
Human Resources management	Support for managing HR processes	3.84
	Insights on engagement and climate	3.83
	Partnership in organizational development processes	3.61
External communication management	Support for corporate branding	3.60
	Activation of employees as brand ambassadors	3.27
	Support in corporate crisis management	3.17
Employees	Clarity and timeliness of information	3.98
	Understanding of company decisions	3.89
	Opportunities to voice up and participate	3.31
Top managers and line managers	Employees aligned to strategies and goals	3.71
	Employees supportive to change processes	3.41
	Employees inclined to openly voice up	3.06

Means on a scale from 1 to 5

According to respondents, internal stakeholders perceive different types of value generated by their work. The most recognized value attributed to employee communication is the **clarity of information and the understanding of corporate decisions by employees**: the stakeholders for whom employee communication exists and for whom more value is generated. The value generated for the human resources function is also significant, in order to support its processes.

In a moment of strong attention to employee ambassadorship programs and to the management of continuous critical events, the low value generated for external communication according to respondents is surprising.
A real warning signal is the low value attributed to the possibility for employees to express themselves frankly: creating a context of voice is not perceived as a priority yet.

Employee communication **is becoming strategic**:
• an increasing number of companies have established
  a formal function over the past 10 years
• top management is involved in defining its aims

However the role attributed to the function is still focused on spe-
cialistic activities. The strategic role component, linked to the partic-
ipation in corporate decisions beyond communication, is very weak.

RECAP

Employee communication...

Is it strategic?

Formal and young function, reporting to the Corporate Communication Department

Specialistic rather than strategic role

Aims defined by top managemen

Value generated for managers to be increased

Small teams

Employee communication...

Is it run with a managerial approach?

Planning

Budget

Measurement

Agencies
and providers

Is employee communication planned?

49%
31%
17%
3%

🟢 **YES through a formal plan**
🔵 **YES in informal ways**
🟡 **NO**
🔴 **Missing response**

n=141
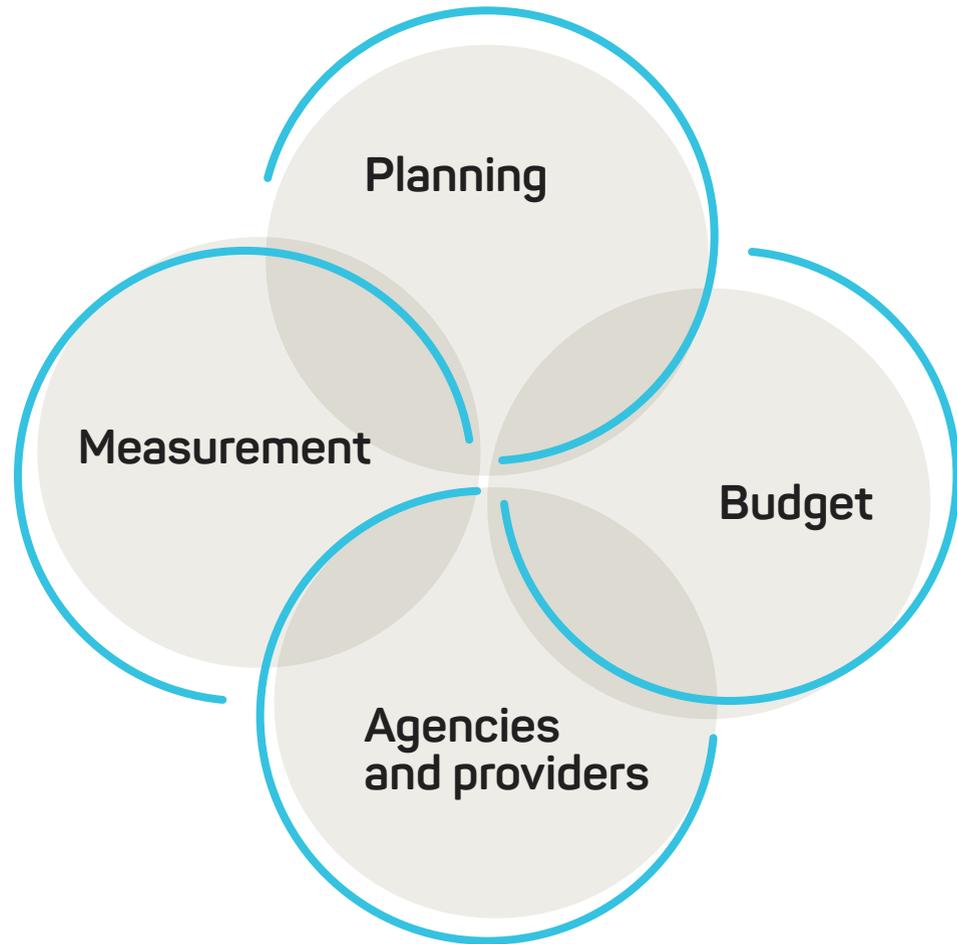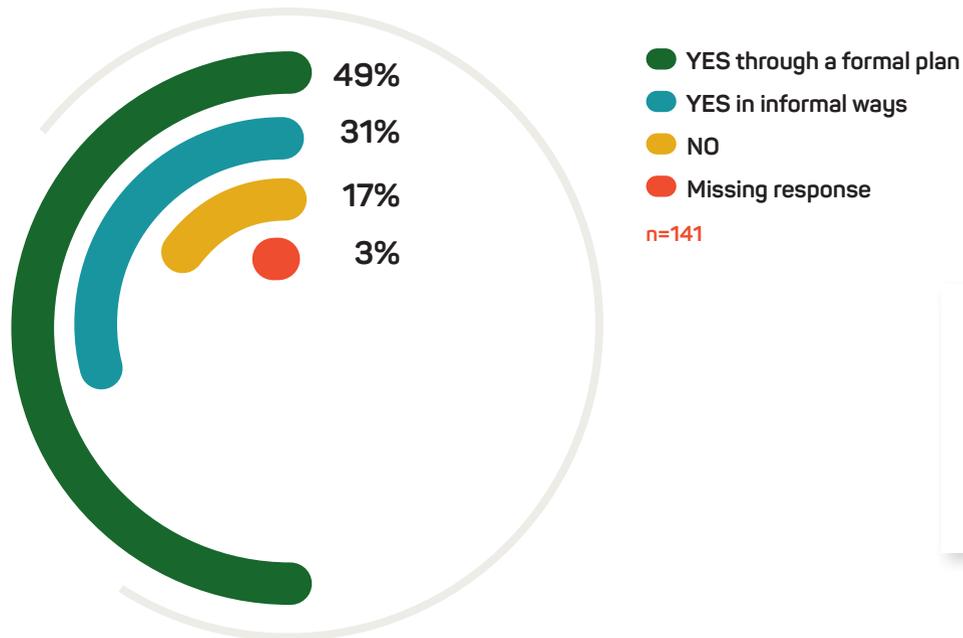
Written annual plan identifying key activities: **50%** (Gatehouse, 2017)

Companies that have a formal EC function have a formal EC plan: **74%** (Nelli, 2018)

The communication plan has a good level of diffusion.
The figure confirms a trend observed worldwide and in Europe.
The communication plan, which is the most important managerial method, is consolidating itself as an indispensable practice.
The advantages of defining a communication plan are clear:
• orientation towards medium-long term objectives
• avoidance of an emergency logic

• overall perspective and achievement of synergies between initiatives
• more effective use of resources
• anticipation of critical issues and potential conflicts
• measurability of the generated value and its communication

With the awareness that only **flexibility** makes a communication plan really effective.

Gruppo Unipol
Informing, engaging, doing.
When employee communication meets business

The **Employee Communication** function in Gruppo Unipol is included in the Corporate Communication and Media Relations Department. Since 2016 the structure has been involved in a **wide-ranging project** aimed at bringing benefits to the whole organization through collaboration and listening.

This approach represented a radical change of perspective in the function positioning: **from an on demand service to a strategic resource supporting the business**. The main activity streams are focused on **People Engagement, Digital Workplace and the evolution of collaboration processes inside the company**.

The methodology implemented within each communication plan is articulated in three moments:

- **Informing:** definition of key messages and tools to be used in online/offline communication plans dedicated to each department/business function
- **Engaging**: promotion of occasions for listening and involvement aimed at internalizing goals and messages
- **Doing**: measuring the impacts on the business and activating virtuous behaviors

In this way the function becomes an enrichment tool for enriching the *employee life-circle* within the organization, positively affecting the **internal reputation**. At the same time it constitutes a significant driver to increase customer satisfaction; a 360° business partner able to inspire and align all company levels.
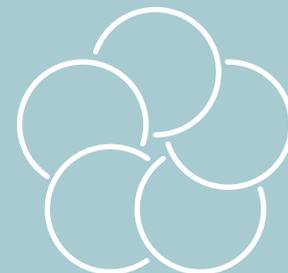
The budget
for employee communication

How much is it?

🔵	Missing response	21%
🔵	Over 200 K	17%
🟢	10 K - 49 K	15%
⚪	0 K - 10 K	15%
🟡	No budget assigned	13%
🔵	50 K - 99 K	12%
🔴	100 K - 200 K	7%
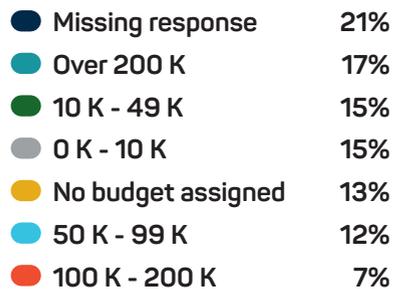
Data in euros
n=141

Budget is a critical point, as evidenced by high non-responses and cases where no budget is assigned.
However the situation is consistent with the one which emerges worldwide.
A strong indicator of weakness.

How did it evolve?

🔵	Stable	43%
🟢	Missing response	26%
🟡	Increased	22%
🔵	Decreased	9%
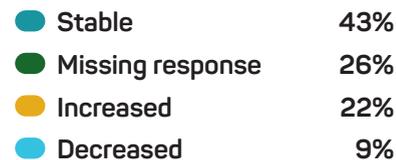
In the last year
n=141

No dedicated budget: **25%**

Budget expectation in the next 12-18 months:
- unchanged **39%**
- growing **21%**
- decreasing **23%**

(Gatehouse, 2017)

Use of external agencies or providers
for employee communication

Average use 2.27
Mean on a scale from 1 to 5

Use of agencies **12.5%**
(Goodman et al., 2017)

To what extent?

81%   **19%**

35%   29%   17%   13%   6%

Not at all   Very much

For what reasons?

Access to innovative projects and solutions	**3.16**
Need to carry out initiatives quickly	**2.80**
Saving of resources	**2.34**
Lack of skills internally	**2.32**
Little interest in managing this activity directly	**2.02**

Means on a scale from 1 to 5
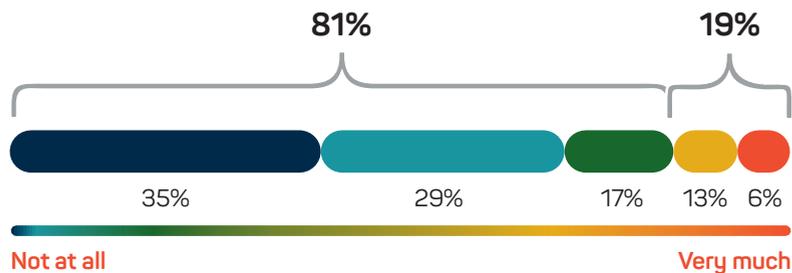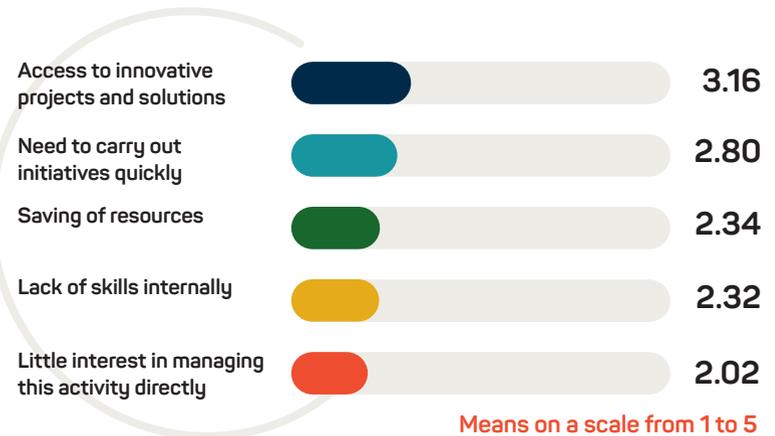
The use of agencies or external providers is very limited, as in the USA. Is employee communication carried out largely internally because it is too strategic to be entrusted outside or for reasons of effectiveness? The analysis of the reasons indicates that innovation and speed are the two key factors.

The agencies specialized in employee communication play a crucial role in the dissemination of innovation and best practices. However, attention needs to be paid to homologation: for this reason, a good degree of internal supervision is useful.

What indicators are used to measure
employee communication?

Output
- Level of use of communication channels — 3.70
- Number of initiatives and tools — 3.40

Outtakes
- Employee satisfaction with communication — 3.91
- Content recall and interest — 3.79
- Messages received by employees — 3.55
- Employees' interaction with content — 3.44

Outcomes
- Impact on employees' awareness — 3.86
- Impact on supportive employee behaviours — 3.70
- Relationship quality and work satisfaction — 3.50
- Quality of peer-to-peer communication — 3.34

Return on investment
- Impact on business results — 3.29

Means on a scale from 1 to 5

🔵 Outtakes	▬▬▬▬		**3.67**
🟢 Outcomes	▬▬▬		**3.60**
🔵 Output	▬▬▬		**3.55**
🟡 Return on investment	▬▬		**3.29**

The respondents are aware of the relevance of **outtakes** that the communication obtains in terms of memory, interest, satisfaction.
In the same way they pay attention to the **effects on employees** in terms of knowledge and awareness, behaviors and quality of relationships.

The most operational part, connected to the production of outputs, is relevant but it is not the first one. While the specialistic role attributed to the function prevails, communicators are aware that the value of their profession goes beyond the tangible part of the tools they create. Not surprisingly, ROI is still a measuring bulwark to be conquered. But professionals are aware of it.

A managerial approach to employee communication is confirmed by the widespread use of a formal communication plan, which allows orientation to objectives, overall perspective, enhancement of synergies, awareness of impacts and presupposes monitoring and evaluation.

A budget almost always exists, its size is diversified and is stable or rising. The number of companies that don't have a dedicated budget is a worrying fact.

Measurement is focused on the outtakes that the communication obtains and on its outcomes. Respondents are therefore aware that the value generated by their work must be measured beyond the pure tool production.
Work remains to be done to promote measurement in terms of return on investments.

RECAP

Employee communication…

Is it run with a managerial approach?

Widespread formal communication plan

Dedicated budget in many companies

Use of agencies and providers to innovate

Measurement mainly focused on outtakes

Employee communication...

Does it activate employees?

Aims

Social media policy

Tools

Employees and external communication

Relational and informal communication
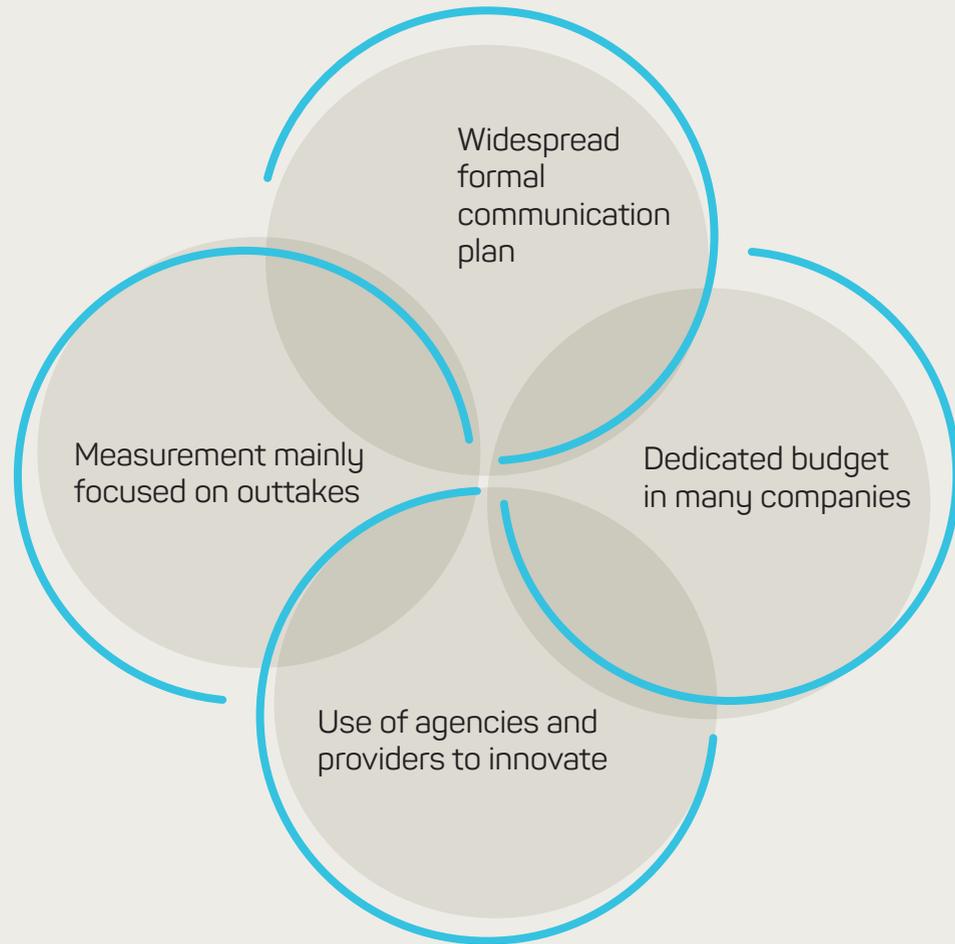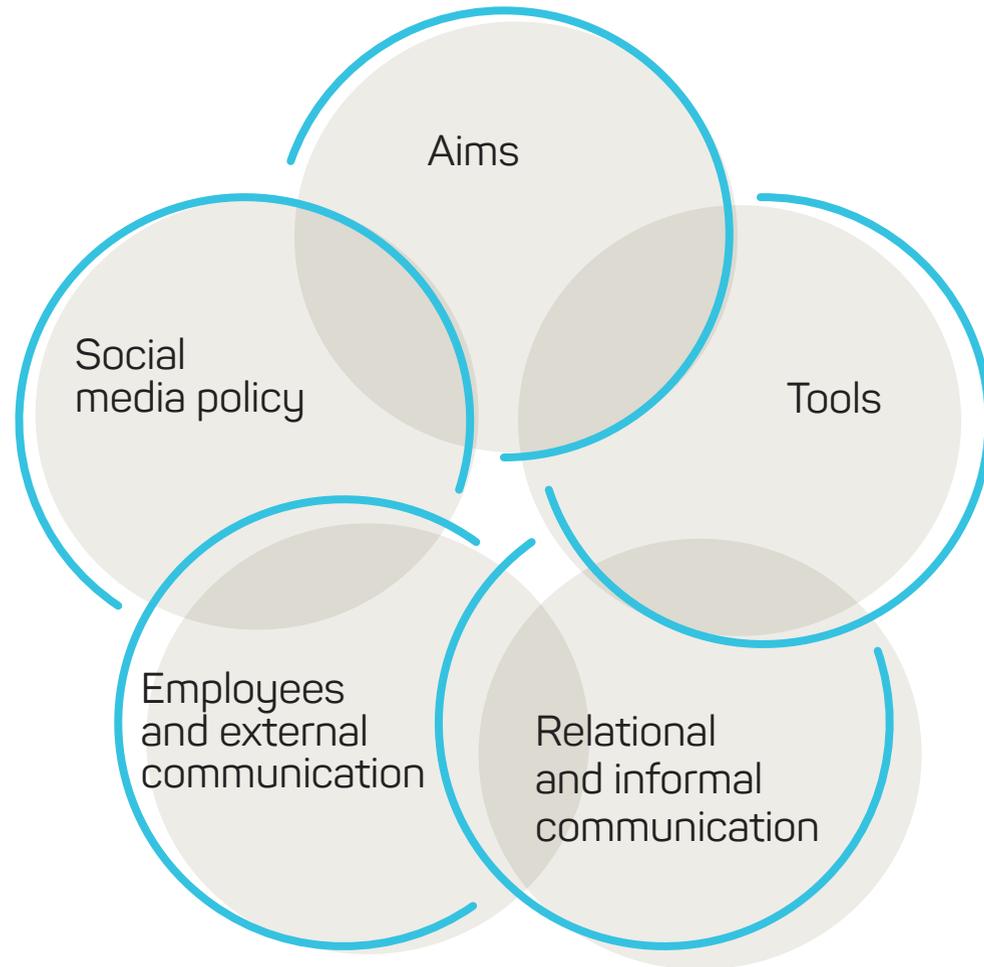
Aims
of employee communication

The ongoing debate attributes several aims to employee communication.
The conceptual model underlying the CERC study groups them into three categories.

Align

Communication centered on corporate messages that the company intends to share, necessary to support the pursuit of business goals
- Sharing messages for **alignment** with culture, values and company strategies/aims
- Disseminating information to support the organizational **functioning**

Enable employees

Communication putting employees at the center to reinforce relationships, widespread skills and awareness, in order to sustain the voluntary and discretionary behaviours of employees supporting the company
- **Enabling employees** to be strategic communicators inside and outside the company
- Supporting employees and managers in the **sense-making** processes related to business information and decisions

Create engagement and climate of voice

Communication aimed at creating a work context characterized by engagement, positive relationships and ultimately by a climate of open communication, where employees feel enticed to express suggestions, interests, constructive dissent, divergent opinions.
- Creating a **climate of open communication** that favors employee voice
- Nurturing employee **engagement**
- Reinforcing **positive relationships** between supervisors and employees and among colleagues

What are the most relevant aims
of employee communication?

Aim	Mean
Align with culture, values and goals	4.49
Sustain organizational functioning	4.28
Sustain employee engagement	4.22
Create an open communication climate	3.80
Support sense-making processes	3,74
Enable employees to be strategic communicators	3.73
Support positive relations	3.60

An excellent Communication Department is active and supports both top executives and employees in communicating: it provides information necessary for decisions and operations, advises on how to manage communication challenges, enables to recognize the communication dimensions which are implicit in actions and decisions (Tench et al., 2017)

Legend:
- Align
- Enable employees
- Create engagement and climate of voice

Means on a scale from 1 to 5

The aims of aligning people with the company and for the organizational functioning are the most important ones, as confirmed by other studies on the state of the art of employee communication.

The **strategic action** of the company, oriented towards the pursuit of aims defined with the autonomy of a self-organized system, is inevitably prevalent. It is the part of employee communication directly managed by specialists and by the dedicated function.

It is tempered by the **communicative action** which is typical of the dialogue and of the search for mutual understanding with interlocutors: creating a climate of open communication, sense-making, enabling employees to share knowledge, supporting brands and issues relevant to the company. The widespread and pervasive nature of employee communication implies that all employees are its actors. The aims of enablement and of engagement and voice, even though less relevant than the alignment aims for obvious reasons connected to the company's purpose, are nevertheless the engine of a truly fruitful employee communication.

MM
Supporting employee engagement
through employee communication

The company has developed an initiative based on the **intranet**, through the creation of a specific section called **"I introduce you"**, which aroused interest and appreciation by the people involved.

The section hosts interviews with employees of each division and function, who have the opportunity to:
- tell their own story
- explain what their business consists of
- make their contribution to the company's business explicit

It is a way "to make the company organizational chart alive and to translate it into human faces", as one of the involved employees observes.

These interviews strongly stimulate the **pride and sense of belonging** in those who tell their story and help to spread **knowledge about the many professionalisms** available in MM throughout the organization. Often the employees themselves apply, so that they can tell their own story.

Therefore "I introduce you" becomes a tool through which the company **gives voice and stimulates the expression of employees** in order to increase their level of engagement and motivation at work.

What are the most used tools
for employee communication?

Category	Type	Value
Based on IT vs. **Based on paper and face-to-face**	Digital	4.17
	Analog	2.75
Sent to employees vs. **Made available**	Push	3.79
	Pull	3.71
Managed by the company vs. **Activated by employees**	Partecipatory	3.27
	Bottom-up	2.55

Growth of digital channels and emphasis on face-to-face communication

Means on a scale from 1 to 5
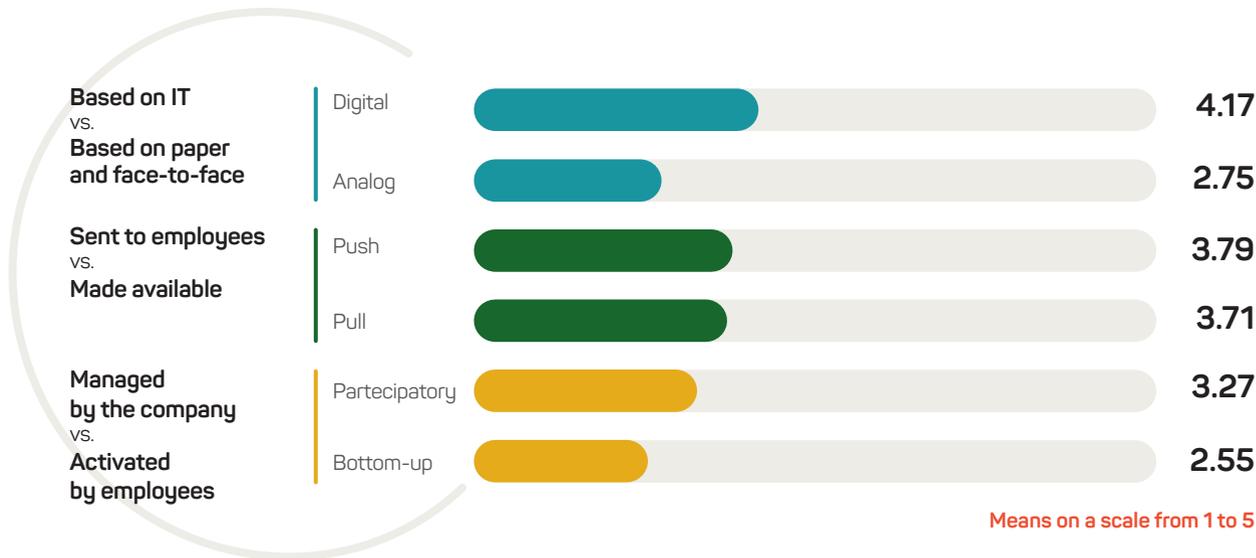
The rapid and continuous evolution of communication tools makes it necessary to map which are the prevailing typologies.

For this reason the Report on Employee communication is based on a **new classification** of tools which highlights the key characteristics affecting their choice. The survey measured the intensity of their use:
• Digital tools, i.e. supported by technologies, compared to more traditional ones, that is printed on paper or face-to-face
• Push tools, i.e. sent to employees such as a newsletter, compared to pull ones, that is made available for the discretionary use of employees, such as videos on the intranet

• Tools that give employees the possibility to participate and interact and that are managed by the company, such as an engagement survey, compared to those that open bottom-up channels through which employees can take the initiative to express suggestions, opinions and even dissent, such as spaces on internal social media or the "open door policy"

Digital tools prevail on paper and face-to-face ones; push and pull tools are in balance; participation managed by the company predominates on participation activated by employees.
Tools implemented for free use of employees begin to appear.

Coopselios
Rethinking the newsletter:
digital storytelling for employee engagement

Over the years, Coopselios produced the newsletter addressed to its employees in pdf format and made it available on the intranet. Recently the organization invested in the launch of the **new digital newsletter**, and started to both upload it on the digital intranet platform and send it through an email marketing system which, compared to the previous solution, allows to have targeted analytics on access and content use.

The **aims** that pushed the company to evolve towards a new digital newsletter model are:
- to make employee communication's **content usable by employees in an easier way**
- to **increase the percentage of readers**
- to **generate greater sharing on the company website**

Compared to the past, the new tool allows to structure a style of **communication that is enriched with images, videos and links**, with a **relevant editorial work**. It also allows to differentiate between public news, which refer to further information on the website, and internal news, visible only to Coopselios employees.

The challenge is now to increase employees' engagement in relationship to the new tool, through the use of **storytelling**, **video content** and the development of a specific **communication plan**.

Eni
Focusing and customizing content access
through new technologies

In line with the digitization process of the company, at the beginning of 2018 Eni made an important investment in the renewal of the **MyEni intranet**, to increase its effectiveness and stimulate engagement. MyEni became usable both from the **internet** and from **mobile**, and is supported by an editorial staff that takes care of the editorial plan in Italian/English, with weekly publications of high-profile **international content**, to create constant reading habits.

The new intranet is the only access point to all the content related to corporate strategy and life. Besides the traditional navigation by menu, MyEni presents a dominant **magazine** part, which is characterized by a strong visual impact and is useful to make employees and management protagonists of the communication.

The company also chose to integrate the **CEO's blog** into the intranet homepage, with a widget automatically showing the most recent post, and focused on the **internal video channel Enitube**, which strengthens visual communication by bringing in just one place numerous videos featuring employees, internal web-series, business videos and podcast of internal events.

Lastly the company introduced new features that are highly appreciated by users, such as:
- **a voluntary email-based alert system** based on thematic macro-categories, to allow people to **customize** their access to information
- a **utility bar** that notifies employees useful service news, such as the closing of a consulate or a transport strike, through a **badge system**
- a **system of push PC notifications**, Snapcomms, which invites employees to discover the news on MyEni and propose gamification activities, according to an editorial plan aligned with the publications on the CEO's intranet and blog
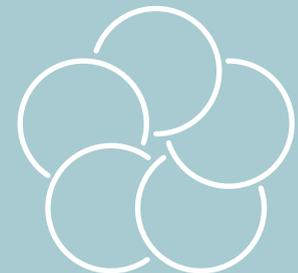
Snam
Towards a multi-channel
employee communication

Since 2017, when the company formalized a team dedicated to employee communication reporting directly to the HR Director, Snam has focused on an **employee communication ecosystem** with a consultancy approach, in order to address the communication needs of the various business activities, guided by the mission to support the cultural transformation of the company and oriented to multichannel:

- **a corporate intranet**, grown in terms of both published news and videos, which helps to increase the internal events visibility thanks to **streaming** and the use of **webinars**. A project is underway to launch a new intranet in 2020
- **face-to-face** communication initiatives that consist in company **meetings**, **cascade meetings** about strategy, specific business units' **roadshows, team building initiatives, meetings with external experts** on issues of interest for the company and **CSR projects for employees** in partnership with the Snam Foundation
- a system of over **30 TV screens** available in the main offices on the national territory, with the development of **ad hoc schedules**
- **a house organ** distributed in all offices, today issued quarterly and with a doubled foliation, which involves a **multi-divisional editorial board** for content development and special articles aimed at deepening specific initiatives and projects
- the use of **PC screensavers** to communicate the most important initiatives
- some email **newsletters** also available on the intranet, that the company aims to standardize through a uniform template and to profile with ad hoc target mailings
- **guerrilla** campaigns with the use of physical assets to ensure greater impact
- experimentation of **social tools** to solicit active participation by employees

Relational communication
between supervisor and employee

Employee communication is largely based on the relations between supervisors and employees. This is at the core of employee communication, although it is not a planned and structured tool. For this reason it has been investigated, in particular regarding the benefits that it generates.

Benefits

Engagement		3.62
Sense-making		3.47
Listening to employees		3.40
Credibility of structured employee communication		3.35
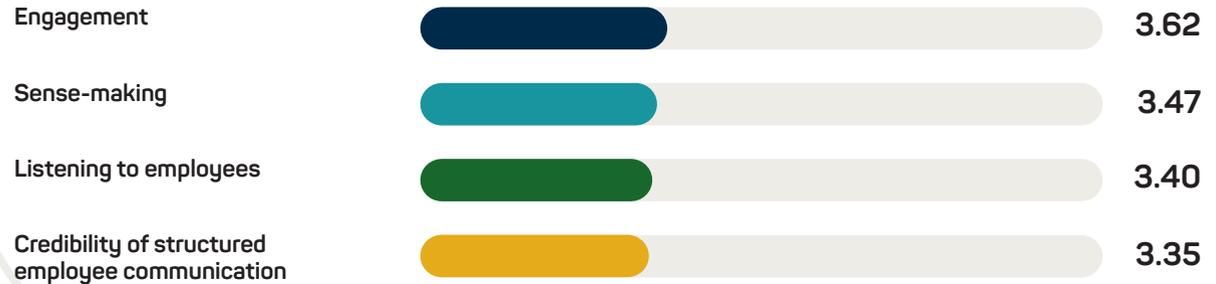
Means on a scale from 1 to 5

The investigated benefits are all perceived in the respondents' companies with similar weight.
Supervisor-employee communication is crucial to integrate structured communication tools, among which the digital ones prevail.
Bottom-up and participatory communication can not easily be implemented through formal tools and can find its most natural and effective vehicle in the managerial channel.

Informal communication

Informal communication is an area that escapes structured employee communication, which is planned and managed by specialists and implemented through specific tools and initiatives. Yet it represents a further area of communication which is very lively in companies: meetings at the coffee machine or relaxation areas, pre and post meeting chats, improvised and informal sharing in open spaces, meetings which occur out of office and outside working hours. It can be a vehicle for knowledge transfer or the genesis of rumors, gossip and misrepresentation of facts. Its importance leads to the conclusion that it cannot be ignored. The Report on Employee Communication therefore investigated whether companies are aware of it and whether they develop strategies to manage it.

How is it managed?

Encouraged for knowledge sharing and team building	3.32
Ignored	2.16
Opposed to avoid rumors	1.96
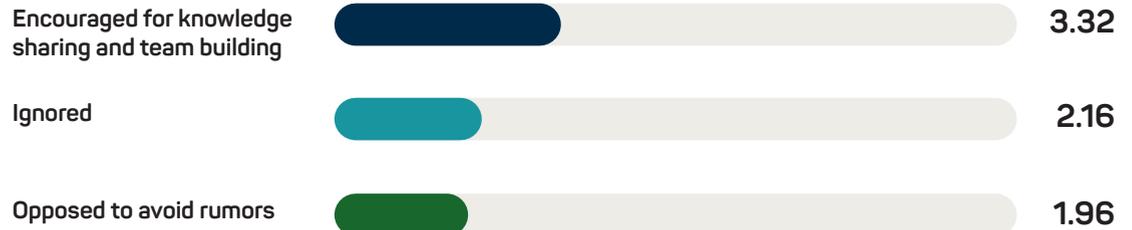
Means on a scale from 1 to 5

The study shows that **informal communication is today considered an area to be carefully taken into account**: it is rather relevant, being the locus for knowledge circulation and team spirit creation, with a positive value.
Open-plan work spaces, and equipped with areas for relaxation and conversations, create contiguity and the increase of social connections in horizontal and transversal networks. Other solutions are also implemented to facilitate informal communication, an unknown territory that has been kept circumscribed as much as possible in the past.

Involvement of employees
in external communication activities

Employee communication aimed at activating employees in their role as potential strategic communicators could find a natural outlet in their involvement in external communication activities.

How are employees involved?

They develop contents under the CorpCom's supervision	2.66
They are enrolled as ambassadors in communication campaigns	2.44
They are invited to endorse CorpCom contents	2.41
They are not involved	2.13
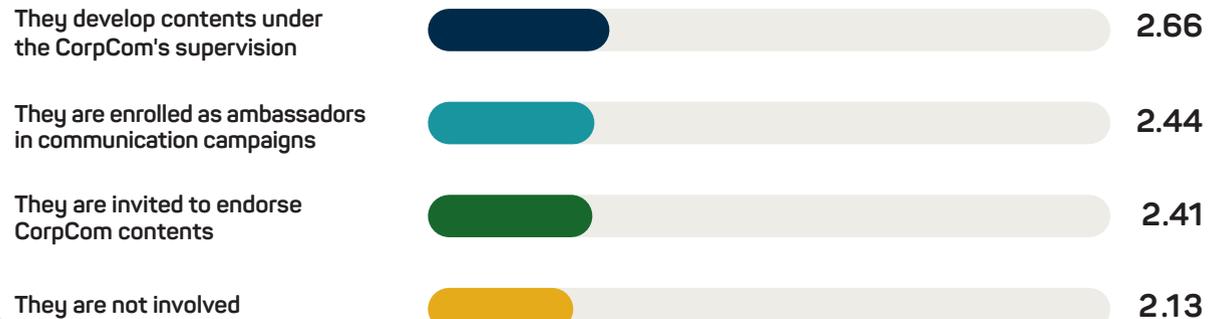
Means on a scale from 1 to 5

Companies in this study do not value the role of employees as brand advocates and ambassadors. From this point of view, there is a development potential already explored through some successful experiences to be considered as best practices probably starting a new trend.

Cromology Italia
Voluntariness and "non-control" as principles for
involvement of employees in external communication

Cromology Voices is a project launched in May 2019 by Cromology Italia aimed at sustaining the **voice of employees on LinkedIn**, making them active and aware in sharing content and professional experiences, in order to increase their **engagement** and **brand ambassadorship**.

The principle of **voluntariness** played a very important role during the launch of the project, intended as open to all the people in the company regardless of role and seniority: "Would you like to share your professional results? Are you interested in talking about topics you are professionally expert upon?".

The launch was followed by a phase of **one-to-one mentoring** in order to:
- create or optimize the LinkedIn profile of the involved employees
- create an individual editorial plan, with content inspired by the work and personal skills of each person to develop the content to be published

A group **training day** was also organized with a **LinkedIn** expert.

Another key element is the fact that each employee **can independently decide what to post, without prior approval by the company**.

The feedbacks to date are excellent in terms of enhanced sense of belonging, better inter-functional knowledge, sharing of the working approach and corporate reputation.
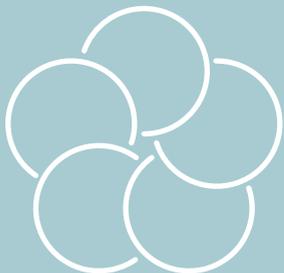
Whirlpool EMEA
Training and platforms for employee advocacy
"(W)influencer"

(W) influencer is a global **employee advocacy** project, started at the Whirlpool headquarters based in the USA and launched in the EMEA region in March 2019.

Its aims are:
- to **maximize the employees' presence** on **social media**, mainly on LinkedIn but also on other social platforms (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter)
- to **encourage** employees to be **authentic company ambassadors**
- to **educate** employees to manage their **presence on social networks**

In Whirlpool's vision, a (W)influencer is the one who amplifies positive stories related to the company through the use of social networks, generating **brand exposure and brand awareness**, recommending products and services and supporting corporate reputation.

For the launch of the program, the company organized the **seminar "Rock Your Profile"** with Linkedin in the EMEA headquarters in Pero (near Milan) and turned it later into a webinar for the rest of the region.

One of the tools supporting the project is a **social toolkit**, **available to all employees**, intended to communicate the key principles of the initiative and the main tips on how to optimize the effectiveness of the personal social contribution in favor of the Whirlpool brand.

The toolkit explains to the potential (W)influencers what the official company pages and hashtags are; how to update and optimize their personal social profiles, also through the use of photo headers specially produced by Whirlpool; how to produce effective posts, even through the presentation of best practices.

The company has also made an **ad hoc platform** available to employees (WHR360), which acts as a **privileged and certified source of content that can be shared on social media**.

Who is authorized to use channels
for external communication (social media, website)?

Role	Percentage
CorpCom Officer	65%
Marketing Officer	41%
CEO	41%
Designated official spokespersons	33%
Public Affairs Officer	17%
Investor Relations Officer	13%
Finance Officer	6%
Legal Officer	5%
Other	20%
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	10%

**Multiple answers possible
n=143**

CCO	95%
Designated employees	46%
IR Officer	46%
Mktg Officer	29%
(Goodman et al., 2017)	

Social media policy

The role of employees as communicators outside the company is more and more often played on social media, either intentionally or accidentally.
Indeed employees have the opportunity to interact with content concerning the company. This can happen on pages belonging to third parties or to the company itself: however employees expose themselves through their own personal social media accounts. **Companies therefore have to prevent legal and reputational risks** and, at the same time, to preserve the potential for dialogue with stakeholders offered by social media. How to untangle this difficult situation?
One way is the adoption of a social media policy dedicated to employees, i.e. guidelines for the use of social media when linked to topics and situations relevant to the professional role of individuals.

Has it been adopted?

66%
34%

● Yes
● No

n=143

Who issued it?

CorpCom Department	**43%**
Human Resources Department	**21%**
Legal Department	**3%**
CEO	**2%**
Board of Directors	**1%**
Other	**14%**
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	**16%**

n=95
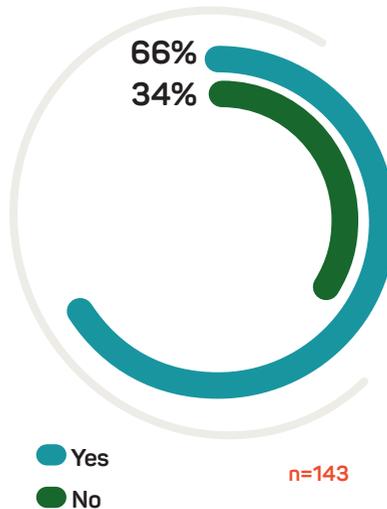
Most companies adopt a social media policy, albeit not in the percentage of US companies.
The policy is mainly issued by the Corporate Communication Department. The topic is on the companies' agenda and corporate communication is in the front line to manage it, due to the evident consequences on company's reputation.
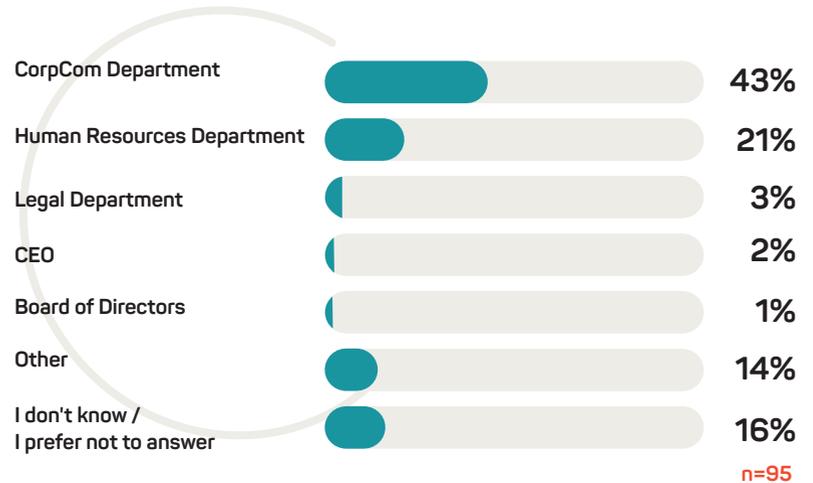
Policy for personal use of social media by employees:
adopted by **90%** of companies and issued by: **CEO, CorpCom, Legal**
(Goodman et al., 2017)

Social media policy: what it says about the use of **personal social media**

The social media policy

Invites to specify that comments are personal	26%
Ignores blurring	19%
Forbids blurring	13%
Encourages blurring	7%
Invites to disclose the organizational membership	2%
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	12%
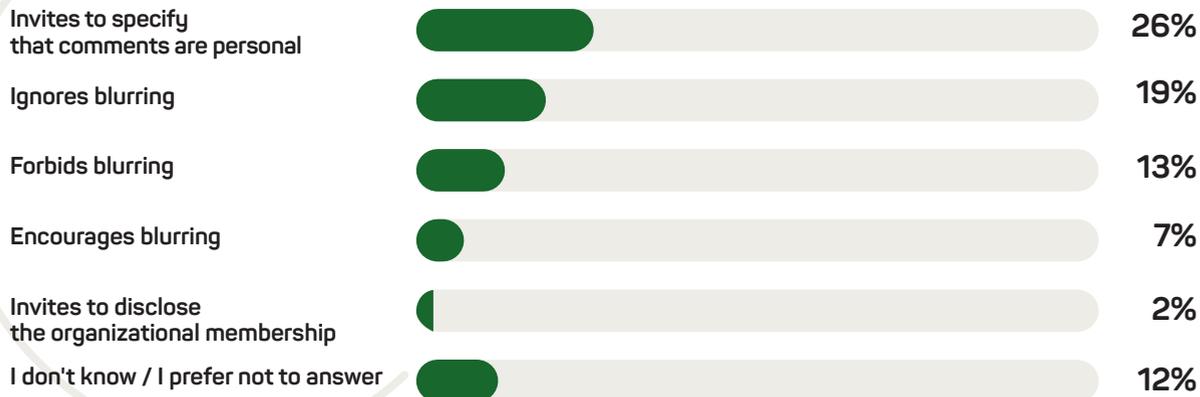
8 out of 25 SMPs explicitly encourage employees to talk about their work and the company

17 out of 25 recognize this possibility without encouraging it.
(Mazzei, Butera, 2016)

Multiple answers possible n=143

The most common indication is to specify on personal social media accounts that every comment and statement is made in a personal capacity. It's obvious that this shows the intention to protect the company from any expression which is inappropriate or even infringing any right or rule.

The key topic is that of **blurring**, that is mixing personal and professional life on social media accounts. Regarding that:
- many companies simply don't consider it, showing unconsciousness
- a certain number of companies explicitly forbids it: in this case the prevailing concern is preventing reputational and legal risks by avoiding that employees even involuntarily behave in an inappropriate way
- a small percentage encourages it: this underlines the company's willingness to seize the opportunities available to enter in authentic contact with its stakeholders

It is important to underline the delicacy of this type of rules, which crosses the rights to freedom of expression and privacy.

Vodafone Italia
Defining a social media policy
for a responsible and conscious use of social media

In 2019 Vodafone Italia decided to develop a **social media policy** proposing to employees **principles, rules and guidelines** to sustain a **responsible use of internal and external social media** and to make them aware of how their use can contribute to strengthen but also to damage the brand's reputation.

The **policy** is targeted to employees of Vodafone Italia and its subsidiaries with reference to:
- **communication activities on employees' social media on behalf of the company itself**, while carrying out their own role and work activity
- **communications made through social media in their personal capacity in which the Vodafone brand is mentioned** in a direct or indirect way

The social media policy is also aimed at third parties who communicate on behalf of Vodafone, such as shops, call centers and agencies.

The **document** is very **streamlined** to avoid the employees' perception of excessive heaviness.

As part of the daily monitoring activities of conversations concerning the Vodafone brand on the internet, the **Social Media** team monitors that employees follow the policy principles.

How to draw up the social media policy:
the Enabling vs. Prescriptive model - CERC©

What social media policy model?

A study carried out by CERC on 25 Fortune 500 companies, through a qualitative content analysis of their SMPs, highlighted two possible models: Enabling and Prescriptive (Mazzei, Butera, 2016).

Each company pursues its own specific SMP model along the continuum between Enabling and Prescriptive, depending on its culture and other context variables, such as industry specific regulations.
However, the risk of an excessively prescriptive model is evident: if SMPs merely impose and punish, they are not effective because they arouse resistance, irony and cynicism.

Enabling
Model

Seizing opportunities
- Give all employees the possibility to seize opportunities related to dialogue, reputation and business by interacting with stakeholders on social media
- Prevent ethical, legal and reputational risks through tips: it's a goal connected to the first

Be authentic on social media
- In order to be authentic, employees are invited to declare that they work for the company
- Blurring between personal and professional life on social media is encouraged

Enablement and monitoring
- Employees are supported to properly use their own social media accounts with employee communication, corporate values, training, counseling, use of a supportive tone, skill development, support of the SM team
- Monitoring is based on KPI

Prescriptive
Model

Preventing risks
- Prevent ethical, legal and reputational risks through prescriptions and prohibitions: this is the main purpose
- Only a few designated people (e.g. the Communications Director) are authorized to expose themselves on social media on behalf of the company

Separate company and private life
- Disclosure of membership of the company is required on personal social media for ethical and legal reasons
- Blurring between personal and professional life on social media is discouraged or prohibited

Prescriptions and penalties
- Employees are induced to behave according to the SMP through the recall to compliance, consequences of incorrect behavior, penalties

(Mazzei, Butera, 2016)

Alignment prevails as far as employee activation is concerned:
- the aims of employee communication are primarily related to the dissemination of corporate messages
- the most popular tools are those based on company control

This is the indispensable basis of employee communication. It is desirable that spaces for dialogue and for the free and discretionary expression of employee voice might grow in the future on this strong foundation.
Two very positive elements: communication between supervisors and employees and informal communication are both encouraged and supported.
As the context matures, it remains to be understood whether employees will be more involved in external communication and will have more room for blurring on social media.

RECAP

Employee communication...

Does it activate employees?

Mostly aimed at alignment

Widespread social media policy, it discourages blurring

Prevailing tools: digital, push, pull, participatory

Employees not much involved in external communication

Supervisor-employee communication for engagement

Informal communication is encouraged: sharing and teaming
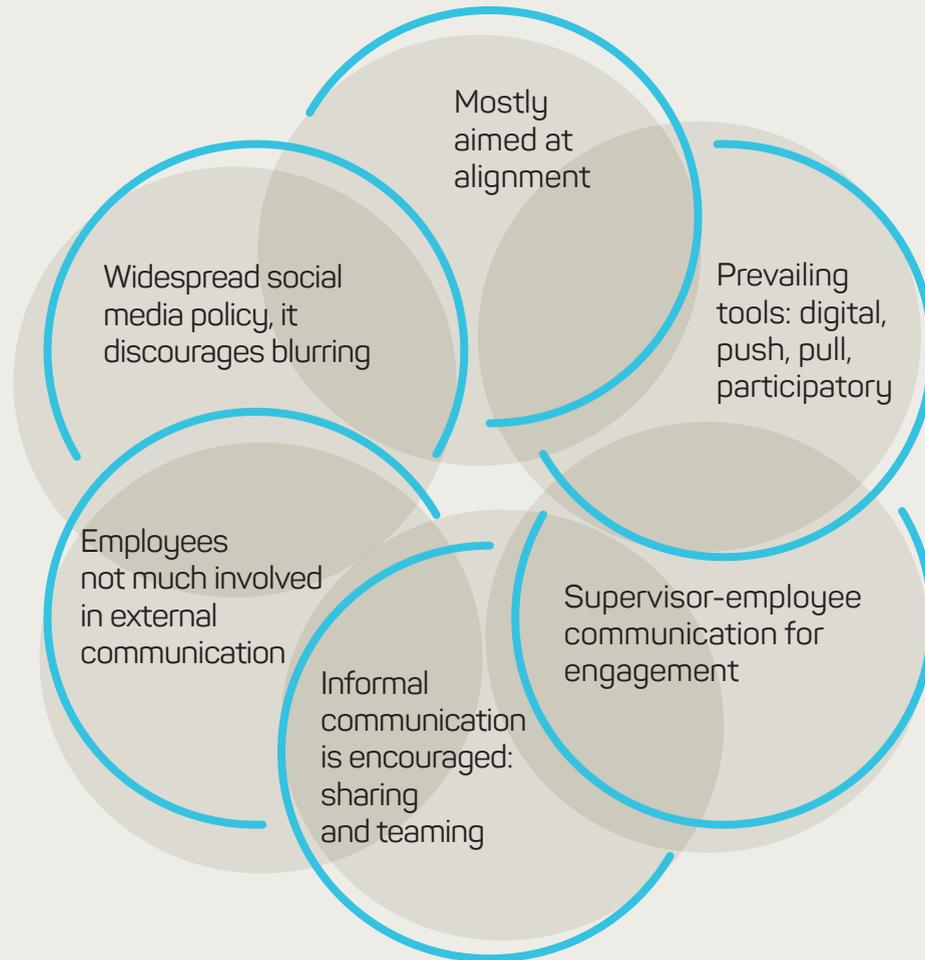
Digital transformation:
a major trend

FOCUS

Employee communication...

Is it digitized?

Digital channels

Obstacles to ISM use

Internal social media (ISM) adoption

Obstacles to ISM adoption

ISM benefits
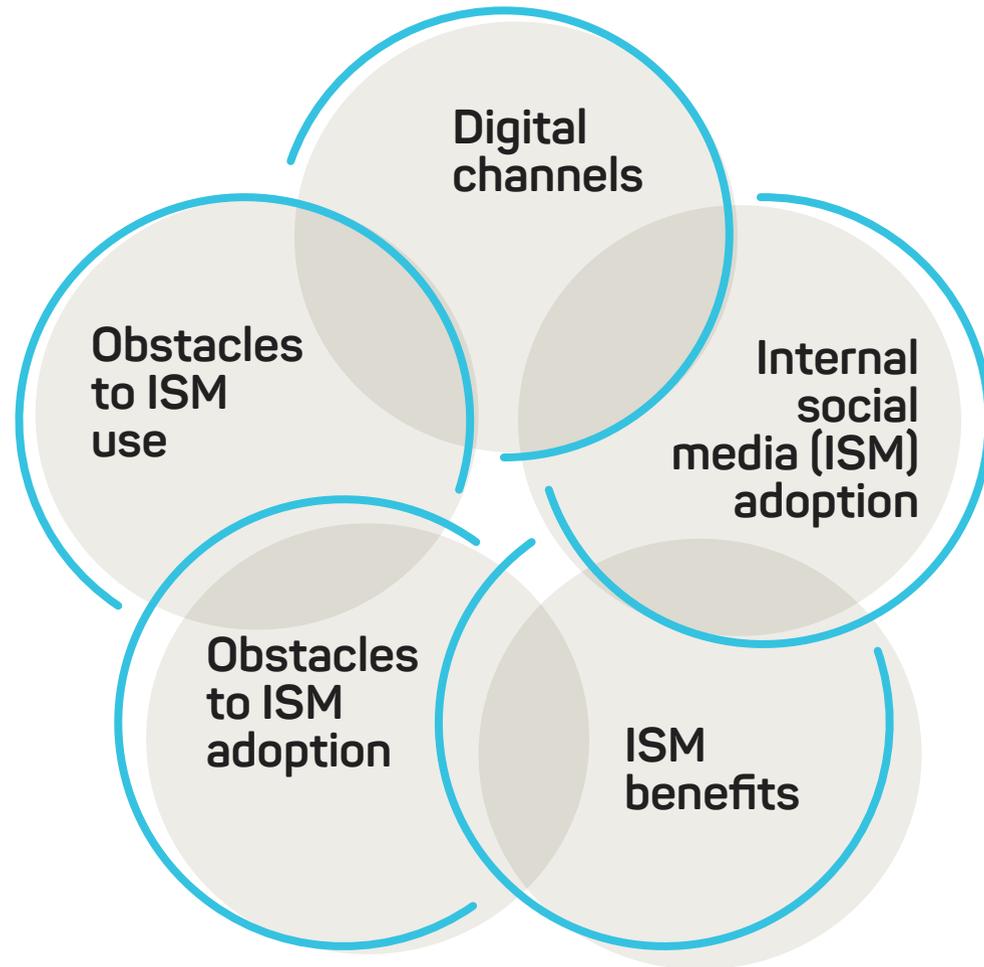
Digital employee communication channels:
how much are they used?

Average use 4.17

Mean on a scale from 1 to 5

20% **80%**

2% 9% 9% 30% 50%

Very low **Very high**
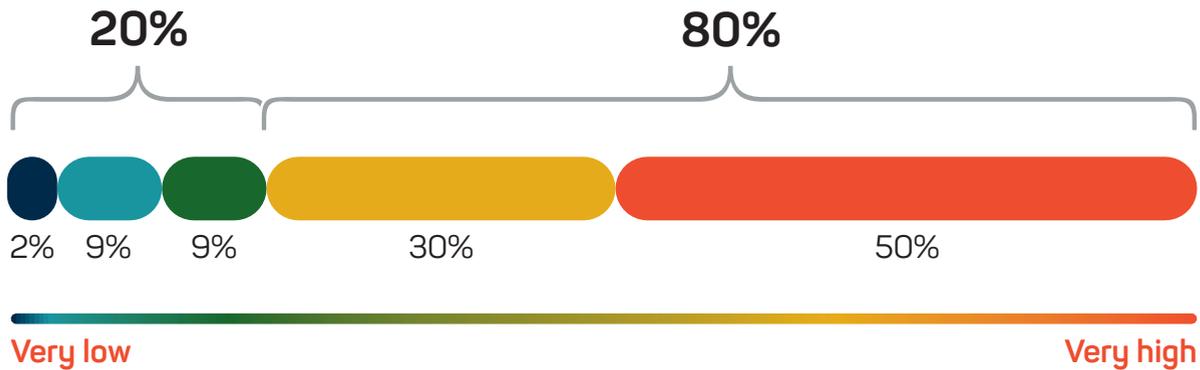
Digital employee communication channels are used very intensively
by the companies included in the sample.

Ferrero
A widespread approach to the digitization
of employee communication

Since 2018, the Ferrero Group has implemented globally and in Italy Forward, the new **digital workplace** based on Sharepoint. It replaced the previous intranet, consisting of a repository without the possibility of interaction among people.

In September 2019 all the company population in Italy has access to Forward from the **company's PC and mobile phone** or **from personal PC and mobile devices**.

The project was challenging due to the composition of the company population: over 50% of factory workers. This challenge was addressed by **enabling the access to the platform at any time and in any place** and thus facilitating the intranet use **also for blue collars**.

A particularly useful section for daily work is **Workspaces**, an area where the users finds all the **shared network folders** that they are using for the projects in which they are involved.

The digitization of the workplace also included the social platform Yammer. This platform:
- is integrated in Forward
- is used by employees through thematic groups that are created on a spontaneous basis
- is not managed through a centralized governance. For a correct use of the platform by users, the company relies on **cultural awareness** and **netiquette**

Internal social media

Have internal social media platforms or features been adopted?

63%
37%

- Yes
- No

n=142

Are they appreciated?

57% **43%**

5% 23% 29% 31% 12%

Very little Very much

n=89
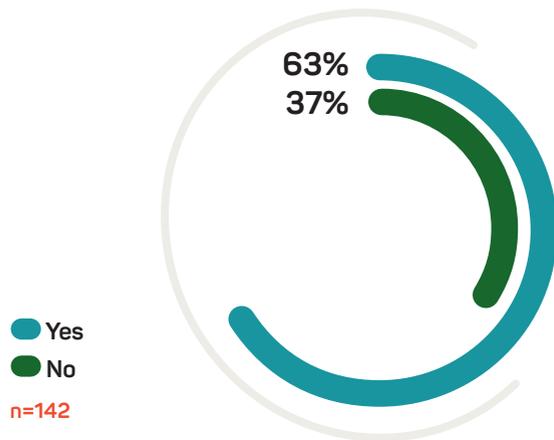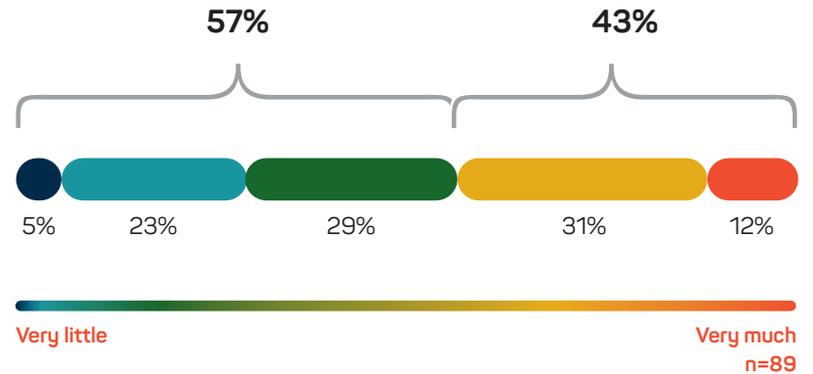
Sella
Measuring the level of engagement and use
of internal social media

In 2016, Sella gave new push to its digitization process with the adoption of a **new workplace**, where particular attention was given to collaboration among people.

A careful work to **measure the results of the project** between 2017 and 2018 highlighted the success of the initiative:
- 100% of employees **registered** on the social network within 4 months
- the **daily average of active users** on the social network went from 10% to more than 50%
- the **active adoption rate**, a parameter that monitors the engagement of online users, has more than tripled
- the **posts published** have doubled, from 10,000 to 20,000
- **posts read by users** have more than doubled, from 1 million to 2 million 400 thousand
- the **number of likes** has increased by over 30%

Beyond the numbers, the actual use has made it possible to evaluate its **positive impact on**:
- **informal conversations** and exchanges among colleagues
- **reduced time to solve problems**
- **growth of collective intelligence**
- **reduction of distances** among people
- **efficiency and productivity**

What are the benefits of internal social media for companies?

Benefit	Mean
Activate conversations between the company and its employees	**3.84**
Increase engagement	**3.68**
Support project management	**3.60**
Generate ideas from the bottom	**3.59**
Improve peer-to-peer communication	**3.59**
Reflect technologies experienced in private life	**3.41**
Increase productivity and flexibility	**3.08**
Keep up with a fashionable practice	**2.68**

Means on a scale from 1 to 5

Companies are betting on the emergence of new organizational communication arenas: **conversations between company and employees which would not take place in the already available communication contexts**. This is a possibility envisioned by studies carried out on the phenomenon (Madsen, 2018). It is not the imitation effect that drives the spread of internal social media. This is confirmed by the survey results about the obstacles to internal social media adoption.

Reducing silos	**53%**
Activating conversations between company and employees	**47%**
Collecting employees' opinions	**34%**

(Ellwood Atfield & ComRes, 2017)

Unicoop Firenze
Internal social media as aggregators of the professional community:
the case of the Sales area

Unicoop Firenze adopted a new **intranet** conceived also as an **aggregator of professional communities** within it.

In particular, the company heavily invested in developing a digital community for **professionals in the Sales area**. The challenge and at the same time the great opportunity offered by the project is to promote the development of a digital culture and a consequent **homogenization of the ways of working among professionals in the same area**: in fact this is the necessary condition to configure technological tools and virtual spaces for online communities that are really effective in supporting work processes.

To bring in a single digital community **all the actors of the commercial process**, from business managers, category managers and buyers up to the foremen of all stores:
- had the objective for the Goods Department **to be able to univocally communicate its messages in one place and with one language**, for example using a video to make everyone understand how to best package a fresh product
- assumes at the same time that those who work in the different points of sales collaborate and communicate with their colleagues in the same way

The birth of this digital context may therefore prove to be decisive in order to increase the **coherence** with which the **decisions taken by the management of the Goods Department** are converted into **concrete commercial actions in the different points of sales**: this creates enthusiasm about the project by its future users.

What reasons hold companies back
from adopting internal social media?

Reason	Mean
Not appropriate organizational culture	3.86
Difficulty in appreciating the generated value	3.66
Fear of loss of control	3.29
Lack of knowledge and skills	3.09
Budget scarcity	2.78
Reduction of face-to-face contacts	2.37
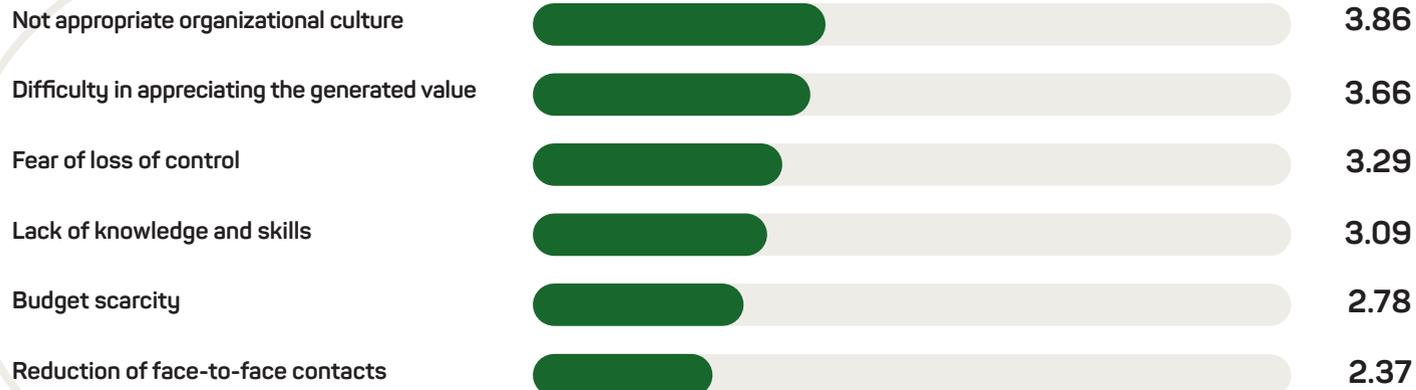
Means on a scale from 1 to 5

The first obstacle is an organizational culture not ready for change and not open to models of open and horizontal communication, which are transversal to hierarchy.

LFoundry
The value of a critical-reflective approach
in the introduction of internal social media

LFoundry can be defined as a highly digitized company that in recent years has equipped itself with **various technological solutions to eliminate paper tools**:

- a **digital signage system** with 8 monitors located in the relaxation areas of the company, whose content is updated on a monthly basis
- an **intranet** with customized pull-access for each employee
- a bimonthly **newsletter** sent by e-mail, which leads back to content published on the intranet through links
- an **online training environment** that offers learning paths on different topics articulated through a number of digital tools: theoretical content, fictions, games, cartoons, documents, references to works of art and literature

In the recent past, the company launched a test on **Facebook Workplace** which has received some favor from the employees involved but which has been blocked for reasons related to data privacy protection, a core aspect for corporate competitiveness.

Today the company is reviewing its considerations about the utility to adopt internal social media, because of the impact that their use can have on the **quality of the interpersonal relationship system** that innervates the organization. LFoundry intends to enhance the direct forms of interaction among its employees, and doubts arise about how the availability of internal social platforms might affect them.
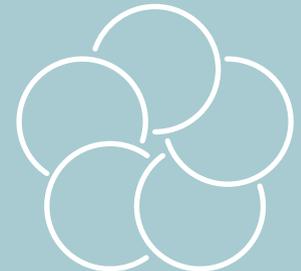
What reasons hold employees back from
using internal social media?

Reason	Mean
Top managers and supervisors do not sponsor them	3.48
Aged employees are not familiar with them	3.23
Risk of irrelevant interventions	3.09
Employees' self-censorship	2.95
Employees perceive them as futile	2.75
Loss of time	2.27
It is more difficult to remember information received online	2.25

Means on a scale from 1 to 5

The **support from supervisors** is a key enabling factor, like in every process of change.
The underlying issue that threatens to undermine the success of internal social media is the **tendency towards self-censorship**: a potential open communication tool could fail due to the attempt to protect oneself and the company.

Self-censorship of employees on internal social media
When employees use internal social media
media, they perceive some **risks**:
• publish low-quality posts and comments
• damage one's own reputation
• violate non-written rules and regulations
• elicit unwanted reactions and comments by colleagues and managers

Self-censorship strategies, with different intensity, are:
• postpone the publication
• reformulate the initial content
• anticipate questions or objections to prevent others' possible reactions
• consult to ask advice on the opportunity to open or take part to a discussion
• choose another channel to express their own opinion
• avoid to publish or to comment
• write only positive comments

Employees self-censor in order to protect the company and themselves. However, this reduces the effectiveness of internal social media.
(Madsen, Verhoeven, 2016)

Saras
Overcoming obstacles to the use
of internal social media

Since 2016 Saras has implemented a **collaborative platform for the integrated management of the supply chain**, available to 170 people located in 4 different companies of the Group and in the same number of locations. The planning was done in a participatory way, analyzing the supply chain processes through interviews and direct observation of the people involved. The name, WeIN, was chosen together with the employees destined to use it.

The **results** of the platform usage are very satisfactory:
- people use it constantly to **share information** and to make documents available and **review them collaboratively**, in a perspective of transparency
- a change in the attitude towards work and the relationship with colleagues emerged
- **communications** are **more fluid** and now take place more easily on a horizontal level **without having to climb the hierarchical chain**

Among the **reasons for the initiative's success**, the following ones stand out:
- the line manager's strong endorsement
- the design and launch of the platform both online and offline
- the fact that the platform is the key working tool around which the employees are activated for the achievement of common goals
- the emergence of natural facilitators that favored a positive sentiment regarding the platform among the people involved

Digitization is very advanced both for the use of digital channels and the use of internal social media.

The potential of internal social media to create new social communication arenas is today in an exploratory phase: the level of appreciation is not high, the possible benefits are clear, but the little inclined organizational culture slows down its adoption. The lack of sponsorship seems to be the main cause of the low use by employees, whose tendency towards self-censorship should be better understood. This could be the result of a poor sponsorship and an inadequate culture.

RECAP

Employee communication...

Is it digitized?

Intense use of digital channels

High rate of adoption of internal social media (ISM)

Obstacles to ISM use: lack of sponsorship and self-censorship

Obstacles to ISM adoption: organizational culture

ISM benefits: conversations, engagement

ISM not so appreciated
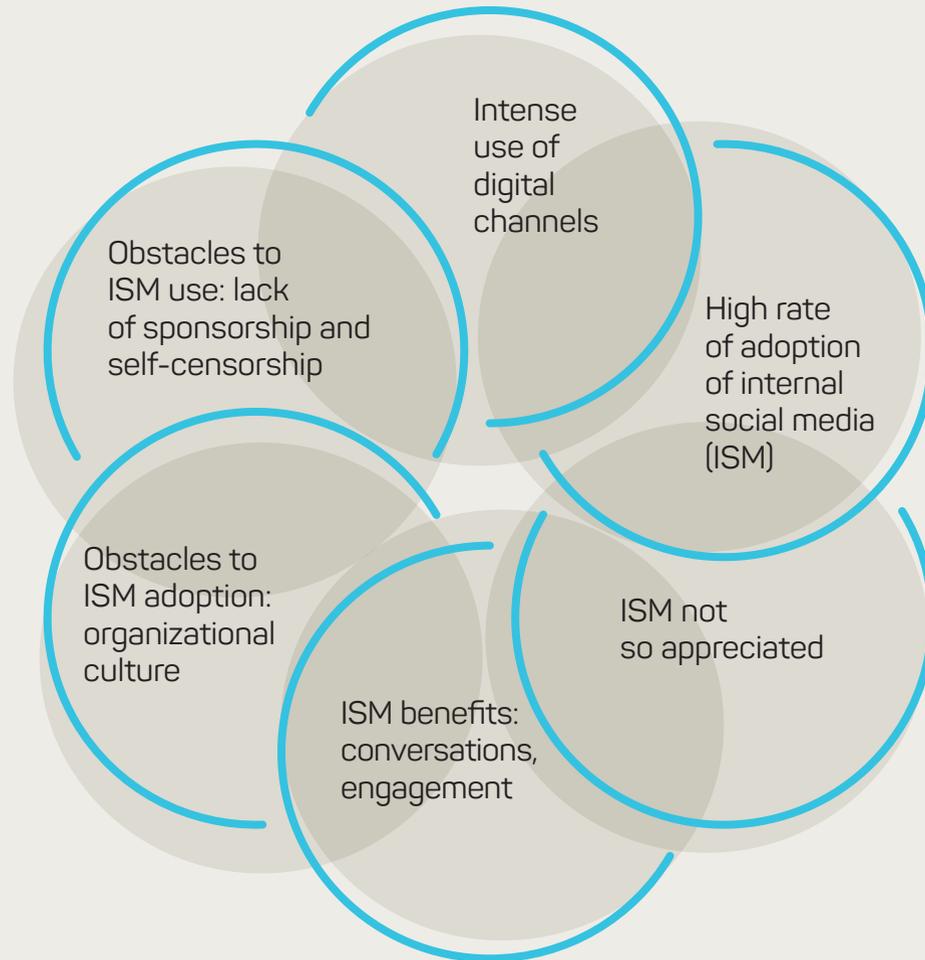
Employee communication...
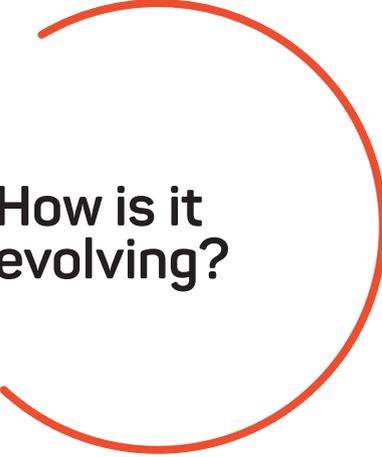
How is it evolving?
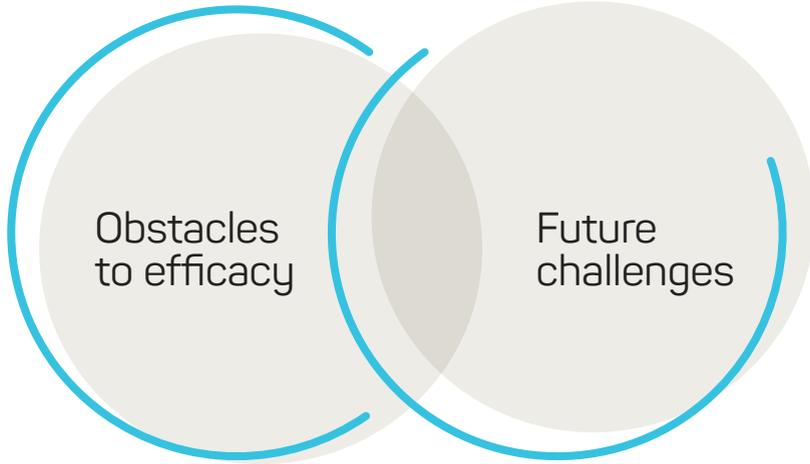
Obstacles to efficacy

Future challenges

What are the obstacles to the effectiveness
of employee communication?

Lack of support from top management	3.28
Lack of support from line management	3.17
Organizational hierarchies and bureaucracy	3.14
Lack of clarity on corporate strategy	3.13
Lack of resources and tools	3.06
Difficulties in measuring employee communication	3.04
Employees difficult to be reached or disengaged	3.03
Lack of time	2.85
Lack of organization	2.77
Inadequate skills	2.53

Means on a scale from 1 to 5

According to the respondents involved in the survey, the **lack of support from both top and line management** is the main obstacle for employee communication efficacy, and therefore for its ability to generate that added value that would positively influence its development.

This underlines an already known element: the urgency to enhance the **culture of employee communication** in Italian companies, as part of the managerial culture.
The other barriers are less relevant and it is clear that none of them will be able to slow down the development of employee communication once an adequate cultural humus is reached.

What are the future challenges
for employee communication?

Challenge		Score
Align employee communication with corporate strategy and values		4.34
Support top and line managers to be effective communicators		4.07
Support corporate branding		4.05
Support engagement in the post-crisis and relaunch phases		4.01
Deal with digitization		3.82
Legitimate the function within the organization		3.72
Identify effective measurement models		3.68
Enhance the role of employees for external communication		3.56
Support the engagement of contingent workers		3.30

Means on a scale from 1 to 5

The challenges of the future represent tests to be prepared for. The topic of alignment, which has already emerged as central to the mission of employee communication, is confirmed as a priority also for the future. Since employee communication relies widely on the communication performed by managers, there will be **a lot of effort on the front of the enabling strategies, that is putting top and line managers in the condition to become strategic communicators**.
Professionals are urged to be prepared in a wide range of areas: cor-

porate branding, post-crisis and relaunch, digitization, which they do not undervalue. Only one aspect seems to be underestimated: the engagement of atypical workers. Considering their growing presence inside companies, it is likely that greater attention will be devoted to them than done so far. The average relevance of the challenges is higher than that attributed to the obstacles: an optimistic look at the future of employee communication, since its protagonists perceive more opportunities than barriers.

Supervisor-employee communication
as a lever for development

"When you talk to an individual, remember: he is important too."

Michele Ferrero

In February 2019, the Gazzetta di Alba newspaper published the "Guidelines of human resources management" that Michele Ferrero, founder of the Ferrero company, wrote over 40 years ago. Some are still very topical to face the challenges described:

1. When interacting with them, **put your employees at ease**: dedicate them the necessary time and not the "scraps", worry about listening what they have to tell you
2. Make clear **decisions** and **get help from your employees**, they will believe in the choices they have contributed to
3. Get employees **involved in the changes and discuss them** with the interested parties **before their implementation**
4. **Communicate positive feedbacks** to employees, communicate the negative ones only when necessary. In this case do not limit yourself to criticism but indicate what should be done in the future, so that it is useful to learn
5. Worry about **what your employees think about you**
6. **Beware of those who flatter you**, in the long run they are more counterproductive than those who contradict you
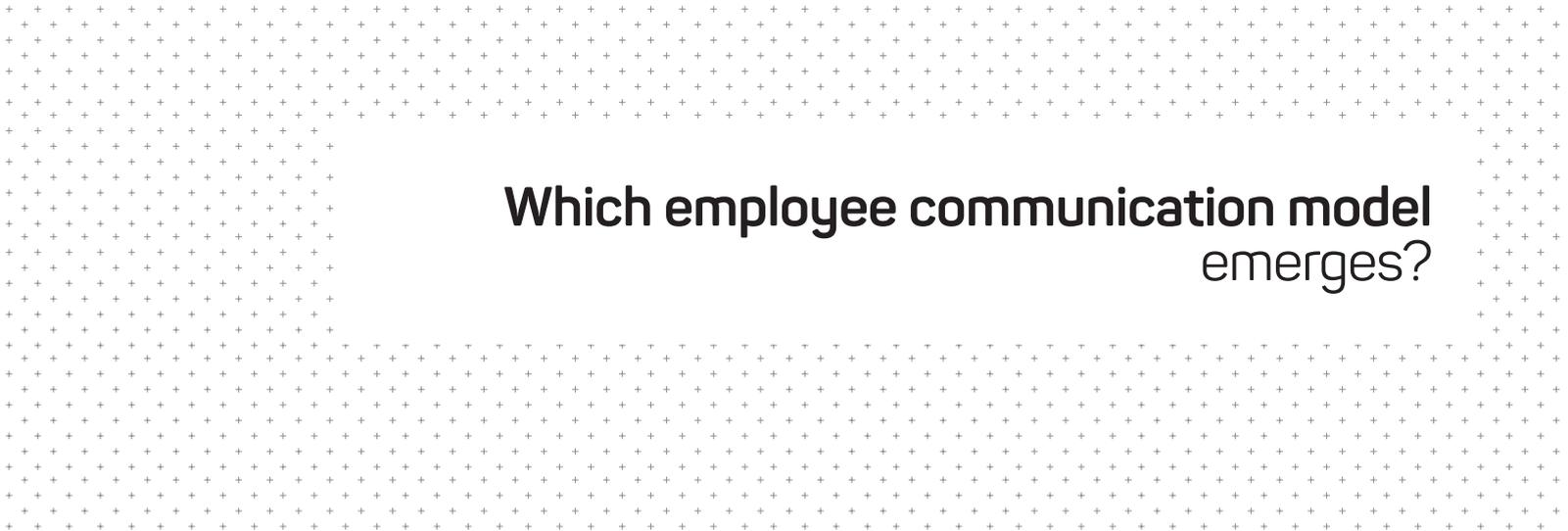
Which employee communication model emerges?

How much widespread is the Enabling Model
of Employee Communication?

To complete the analysis, the CERC study on the state of the art of employee communication in Italian companies presents a set of indices measuring how much the characteristics of the Enabling Model of Employee Communication are widespread. The researchers constructed an index for each dimension of the model, composed as shown below.

Strategic value
- Existence of a formal employee communication function
- Aims approved by the top management
- Level of value generated for internal stakeholders
- Participation in corporate decisions

Managerial approach
- Adoption of a communication plan
- Existence of an annual budget
- Relevance of measurement

Employee activation
- Aimed at employee activation
- Use of pull and bottom-up communication tools
- Involvement of employees in developing content for external communication
- Social media policy that encourages blurring

Digitized
- Intensity of use of digital channels
- Adoption of internal social media

The value of the indices is on a scale from 0 to 10.

The four elements of the Enabling Model compose the «Enablement level of employee communication» Index, calculated on a 0-10 scale.

The Enabling Model of Employee Communication shows a just sufficient diffusion in Italian companies with an index of 6.1. The four elements that compose it are below the sufficient level, except the digitization that is well developed.
Overall it emerges that employee communication in Italian companies is still developing.

Enabling EC

Strategic value	**5.94**
Managerial approach	**5.96**
Employee activation	**5.32**
Digitized	**7.14**

0   6.1   10

Enablement level of employee communication Index, on a scale from 0 to 10.

Companies in the study and the Enabling Model
of Employee Communication

The «Enablement level of employee communication» Index allows to group the companies in this study into three clusters:

THE SEED

Companies in which the Enablement level Index assumes a value between 0 and 5.9. In these companies the Enabling Model of Employee Communication is at an embryonic stage, with a high potential

THE BUD

Companies in which the Enablement level Index assumes a value between 6 and 7.9. In these companies employee communication already begins to be strategic, managerial, enabling and digitized

THE SPIKE

Companies in which the Enablement level Index assumes a value between 8 and 10. These companies have matured an employee communication model with full Enabling characteristics, and they are ready to achieve all the potential benefits of employee communication

**Enablement level of employee communication Index**

| 0-5.9 | 6-7.9 | 8-10 |
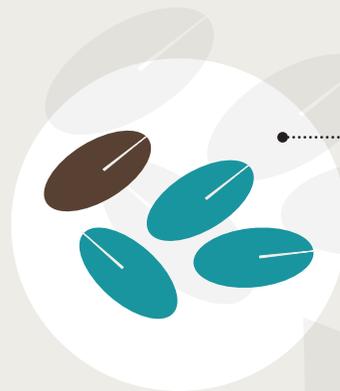
45%
THE SEED
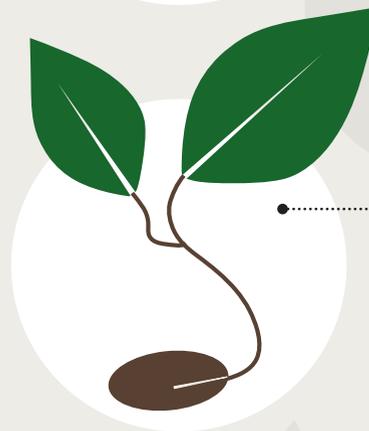
32%
THE BUD

23%
THE SPIKE

n=142

What impact does the Enabling Model of Employee Communication **have on employee engagement?**

The hypothesis at the basis of the employee communication model adopted in the study suggests that when the employee communication has a strategic value, is run with a managerial approach, focuses on activating employees and explores the possibilities of the new employee communication social arenas, it has a positive impact on the level of employee engagement.

All respondents were asked to indicate how high the level of employee engagement was in their own companies. Linear regression shows **a beta coefficient of 0.291 with a p. value which is significant, since lower than 0.01**. This means that the cause-effect relationship between the model's dimensions and the level of employee engagement is intense and significant.

The existence of an Enabling Model of Employee Communication has an **impact on the level of employee engagement**.

Enabling EC
Strategic value

Managerial approach

Employee activation

Digitized

0.291**

** significant since p<0.01

Employee engagement
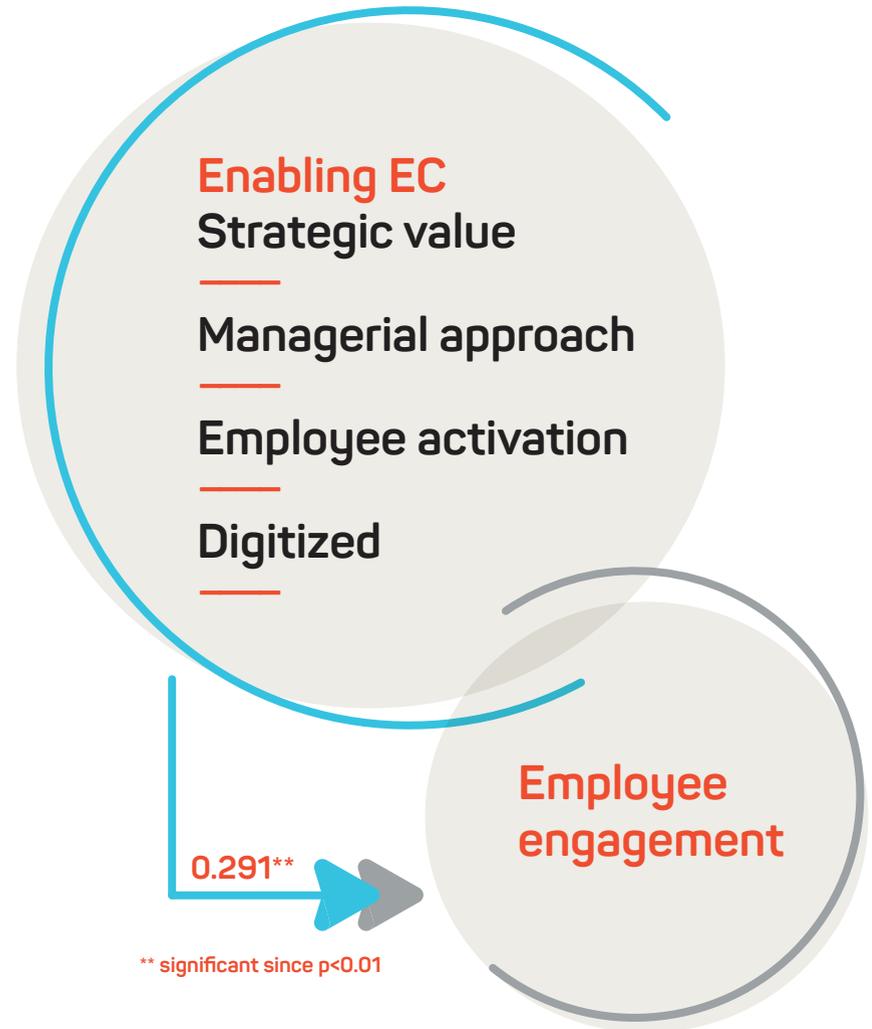
What macro-contextual and organizational factors have an impact on the adoption of the Enabling Model of Employee Communication?
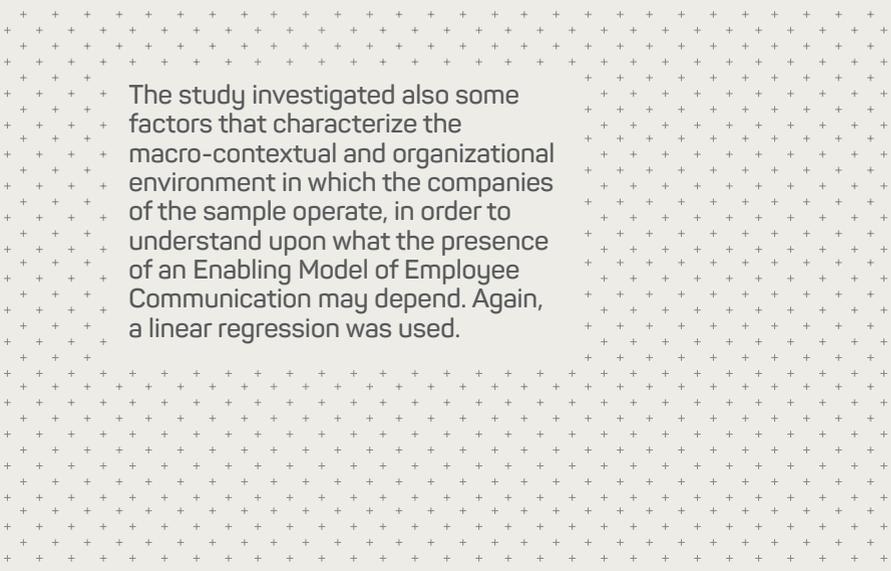
The study investigated also some factors that characterize the macro-contextual and organizational environment in which the companies of the sample operate, in order to understand upon what the presence of an Enabling Model of Employee Communication may depend. Again, a linear regression was used.

- **Industry life cycle**
  new or radically changing

- **Main strategy**
  innovation

- **Organizational model**
  horizontal

- **Managerial style**
  participatory

- **Digitization**
  of business processes
  high

0.218*

0.251**

0.293**

0.322**

0.372**
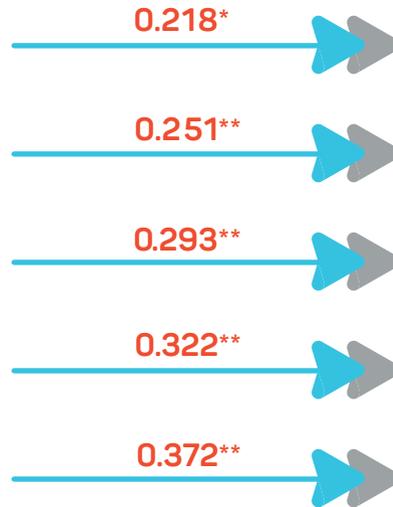
* significant since $p < 0.05$
** significant since $p < 0.01$

Enabling EC
Strategic value

Managerial approach

Employee activation

Digitized

The characteristics of the macro-context and the organizational factors that push a company to adopt an Enabling Model of Employee Communication are:
- to operate in a new or radically changing industrial sector
- the adoption of a competitive strategy based on innovation
- the presence of a horizontal organizational model
- a managerial style focused on participation
- the high digitization of business processes

What conclusions and what open questions?

This study shows that

- Employee communication **is becoming strategic**
- The **function adopts more and more a managerial approach**
- **Enabling employees is not the priority** and the focus on alignment prevails
- Digitization is very advanced for both the **use of digital tools and the adoption of internal social media**. There is awareness about its potential but not full satisfaction
- The case histories presented provide indications on practices and management principles that are spreading and prove to be useful in the current context

Some open questions emerge

- Developing the **strategic** participation of the employee communication function in business decision-making processes
- Raising the need to have a **dedicated budget**
- Widening the **measurement** methods
- Spreading awareness about the **role of communicators played by all employees** and managers
- Strengthening the **culture** of open, horizontal, transversal **communication**, based on dialogue and enabling the free expression of **employee voice** both in the usual contexts and in the **new organizational communication arenas** created by internal social media
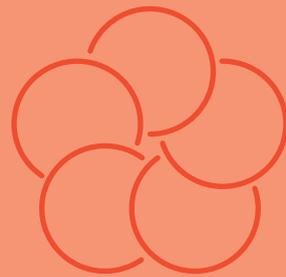
Methodological appendix

The state of the art of employee communication in Italian companies is based on a quantitative study conducted through a survey in order to allow the comparison of data over time and with other contexts.

Data were collected between November 2018 and February 2019 through the submission of an **online questionnaire**, previously tested on individuals similar for characteristics to those chosen as respondents.

A comparative analysis of eight previous studies on employee communication already run in Italy and abroad was carried out in a first phase of the research and allowed to set up this Report in an innovative way compared to the previous ones (Mazzei, 2018). The conceptual model and the topics to be investigated have been developed on the basis of a vast analysis of international studies on the topics covered.

The reference universe of the study is that of Italian companies. The criterion for including companies in the sample was the existence of an interest in the matter of employee communication shown by the company.

The research used a **convenience sample** built using the snowball technique. This choice allowed to contact people who were well-informed on the subject and worked in companies that carry out employee communication activities. Nevertheless, this does not allow to measure the percentage of Italian companies that have an employee communication function or that manage it in a structured and conscious way.

The individuals chosen as respondents to the survey are **managers responsible for employee communication**, who therefore manage employee communication full time or ad interim together with other activities. Respondents were invited question-by-question to report perceptions and information that the role they played allowed them to possess as key-informants.

Overall, the **sample** can be considered **significant** for various reasons:
- the number of cases
- the professional homogeneity of the respondents, all involved in employee communication activities
- the high level of interest shown by respondents in accepting the invitation and in answering all the questions in almost all cases
- their high professional qualification, shown by education level and age
- the heterogeneity of the companies included in the sample, in relationship to industrial sector, age, size, nature

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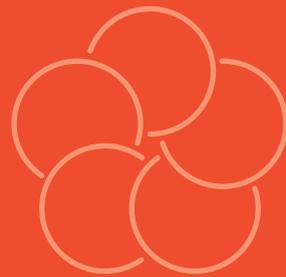
CERC

Centre for Employee Relations and Communication has the purpose of developing and spreading communication and organizational relations culture. It carries out research, dissemination, training and projects on topics related to employee relations and communication. It is supported by a scientific committee which ensures its connection with the main international centers of excellence in this field. It houses the Working Group Employee Communication.

WG_EC

Working Group Employee Communication is dedicated to a two-year special project in partnership with a group of companies. It carries out a research project on an agreed topic. Partner companies and IULM researchers meet 3 times a year for updates on the results of the research project and to delve into topics of interest for the WG_EC. The meetings are topic-focused and run in a peer to peer context.

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THE STATE OF THE ART OF EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION IN ITALIAN COMPANIES outlines the **practices** and **trends** of employee communication and organizational relations in Italy.
The model measures whether employee communication:
• is strategic
• is run with a managerial approach
• activates employees

The study includes a **focus** on the **digitization** of employee communication, **internal social media** and the use of **external social media by employees**.
It constitutes a **benchmark tool** thanks to which each company can map the development status of its employee communication over time and with reference to the Italian situation.
It has been carried out by the Working Group @Centre for Employee Relations and Communication (CERC) 2018-2020 operating at IULM University.